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(*Abridged*)

By
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

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THE DOVE IN THE EAGLE'S NEST

A TALE OF GERMANY IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

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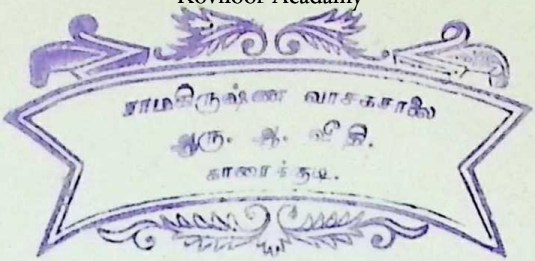

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THE DOVE IN THE EAGLE'S NEST

By Charlotte M. Yonge.

CHAPTER I.

MASTER GOTTFRIED'S WORKSHOP.

The upper lattices of a tall, narrow window were open, and admitted a partial view of the city of Ulm, of the lacework fabric of a half-built cathedral spire, and beyond, the intensely blue sky of early autumn.

The interior of the room was wainscoted, the floor paved with bright red and cream-coloured tiles. It was the workshop of Master Gottfried Sorel, and on the work-table itself, growing under the master's hand, was a long wreath, entirely composed of leaves and seed-vessels. The starred cap of the poppy was actually being shaped under the tool, copied from a green capsule which was held in the hand of a young maiden who knelt by the table, watching the work with eager interest.

She was not a beautiful girl. She was too small, too slight, too shy. If there was something lily-like in her drooping grace, it was the retiring lily of the valley which she resembled—so purely, transparently white was her skin, scarcely tinted by a rosy blush on the cheek, so tender and modest the whole effect of her slender figure, and the

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soft, downcast, pensive brown eyes, in hue like the bright, quick ones of her uncle, the master-carver. His portly form, open visage, and good-natured stateliness, as well as his furred cap and gold chain, were thoroughly those of the German burgomaster of the fifteenth century; but those glittering dark eyes betrayed their French origin, though for several generations back the family had been settled at Ulm. Perhaps, too, it was French quickness and readiness of wit that had made the Sorels so prominent in all the councils of the good free city, and so noted for excellence in art and learning.

Master Gottfried had a scapegrace younger brother named Hugh, who had scorned both books and tools, had been the plague of the workshop, and, instead of coming back from his wandering-year[1] of improvement, had joined a band of roving troopers. No more had been heard of him for a dozen or fifteen years, when he suddenly arrived at his old home in Ulm, half dead with fever, and with a young Italian wife, already broken-hearted and nearly dying. His rude affection had so soon turned to brutality that, when brought to comparative peace and rest in his brother's home, there was nothing left for the poor Italian but to lie down and die, commending her babe in broken German to Mistress Johanna, and blessing Master Gottfried for his assurances that the child should be to them even as their own daughter who had died.

And verily the little Christina had been a precious gift

[1] The German apprentices finished their apprenticeship with a year of travel in foreign countries to see what other workmen were doing.

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to the bereaved couple. Her father soon returned to his roving life, and, except for a report that he had been seen among the soldier servants of one of the robber barons of the Swabian Alps, nothing had been heard of him; and Master Gottfried only hoped to be spared the actual pain and scandal of hearing of his evil end. Meantime, both the master-carver and his wife did their utmost to forget that the gentle little girl was not their own; they set all their hopes and joys on her, and, making her supply the place at once of son and daughter, they bred her up in all the refinements and accomplishments in which the free citizens of Germany took the lead in the middle and latter part of the fifteenth century. To aid her aunt in all house-wifely arts, to prepare dainty food and varied liquors, and to spin, weave, and broider, was only a part of Christina's training; her uncle likewise set great store by her sweet Italian voice, and caused her to be carefully taught to sing and play on the lute, and he likewise delighted in hearing her read aloud to him. In his experiments in printing and wood-engraving, Master Gottfried had found no head so intelligent, no hand so desirous to aid him, as his little Christina's, who, in all that needed taste and skill rather than strength, was worth all his prentices and journeymen together. Of late other occupations had been set aside by the engrossing interest of the interior fittings of the great "Dome Kirk," which for nearly a century had been rising by the united exertions of the burghers. The foundation had been laid in 1377; and at length, in the year of grace 1472, matters were so

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forward that Master Gottfried's stall work was already needed for the choir.

"Three cubits more," he reckoned. "Child, hast thou found me fruits enough for the completing of this border?"

"O yes, mine uncle. I have the wild rosehip, and the flat shield of the moonwort, and a pea-pod, and more whose names I know not. But should they all be seed and fruit?"

"Yea, truly, my Stina, for this wreath shall speak of the goodly fruits of a completed life."

"Even as that which you carved in spring told of the blossom and fair promise of youth," returned the maiden. "Methinks the one is the most beautiful, as it ought to be;" then, after a little pause, and some reckoning, "I have scarce seed-pods enough in store, uncle."

"Well, child, we might ride into the country beyond the walls, and seek them. What, little one, wouldst thou not? Thou hast not forgotten the fright thy companions had from the Schlangenwald soldiers when gathering flowers? Fear not, little coward; if we go far we will take Hans and Peter with their halberts. But I believe thy silly little heart can scarce be free for enjoyment if it can fancy a soldier within a dozen leagues of thee."

"At your side I would not fear," replied Christina.

"My gentle child!" the old man said approvingly. "If our good Kaiser has his way, we shall soon be free of the soldiers of Schlangenwald, and Adlerstein, and all the rest of the wild barons. He is hoping to form a league of us free imperial cities with all the more reasonable and

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honest nobles, to preserve the peace of the country; and, when all are united against them, the free barons must needs become pledged to the league, or go down before it."

"Ah! that will be well," cried Christina. "Then will our wagons be no longer set upon at the Debateable Ford by Schlangenwald or Adlerstein; and our wares will come safely, and there will be wealth enough to raise our spire! O uncle, what a day of joy will that be when Our Lady's great statue will be set on the summit!"

"A day that we shall scarce see," returned her uncle, "unless the hearts of the burghers of Ulm return to the liberality of their fathers, who devised that spire! But what trampling do I hear?"

There was indeed a sudden confusion in the house, and, before the uncle and niece could rise, the door was opened by a comely dame, exclaiming, "O Housefather,[1] there are a troop of soldiers at the door, dismounting already;" adding in a more furtive, startled accent, "and, if I mistake not, one is thy brother!"

"He is welcome," replied Master Gottfried, "he brought us a choice gift last time he came; and it may be he is ready to seek peace among us after his wanderings. Come hither, Christina, my little one; thou art not a child who need fear to meet a father."

Christina's extreme timidity, however, made her pale and crimson by turns, as the three advanced from the little studio through a gallery into a great wainscoted

[1] Housefather: *i.e.* a German term for the master of the house.

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room, with a broad carved stair leading down into it. Down this stair the three proceeded, and reached the stone hall that lay beyond it, just as there entered from the trellised porch a thin wiry man, in a worn and greasy buff suit, and a battered helmet which showed a weather-beaten bronzed face, with somewhat wild dark eyes, and a huge grizzled moustache. Altogether he was a complete model of the lawless soldier or trooper, the terror of Swabia, and the bugbear of Christina's imagination. The poor child's heart died within her as Master Gottfried held out his hands with a cordial greeting of "Welcome home, brother Hugh," she trembled from head to foot, as she sank on her knees, and murmured, "Your blessing, honoured father."

"Ha? What, this is my girl? What says she? My blessing, eh? There then, thou hast it, child, such as I have to give. Now, give me a kiss, and let me see thee! How now!" as he folded her in his rough arms; "thou art a mere feather, as slight as our sick young lady herself."

"Our Christina is not beautiful, we know," said her uncle, reassuringly taking her hand; "but she is a good and meek maiden."

"Well, well," returned the trooper, "she will answer the purpose better than if she were fair enough to set all our fellows together by the ears for her. Camilla, I say —no, what's her name, Christina?—put up thy clothes and be ready to start with me to-morrow morning for Adlerstein."

"For Adlerstein?" re-echoed the housemother, in a

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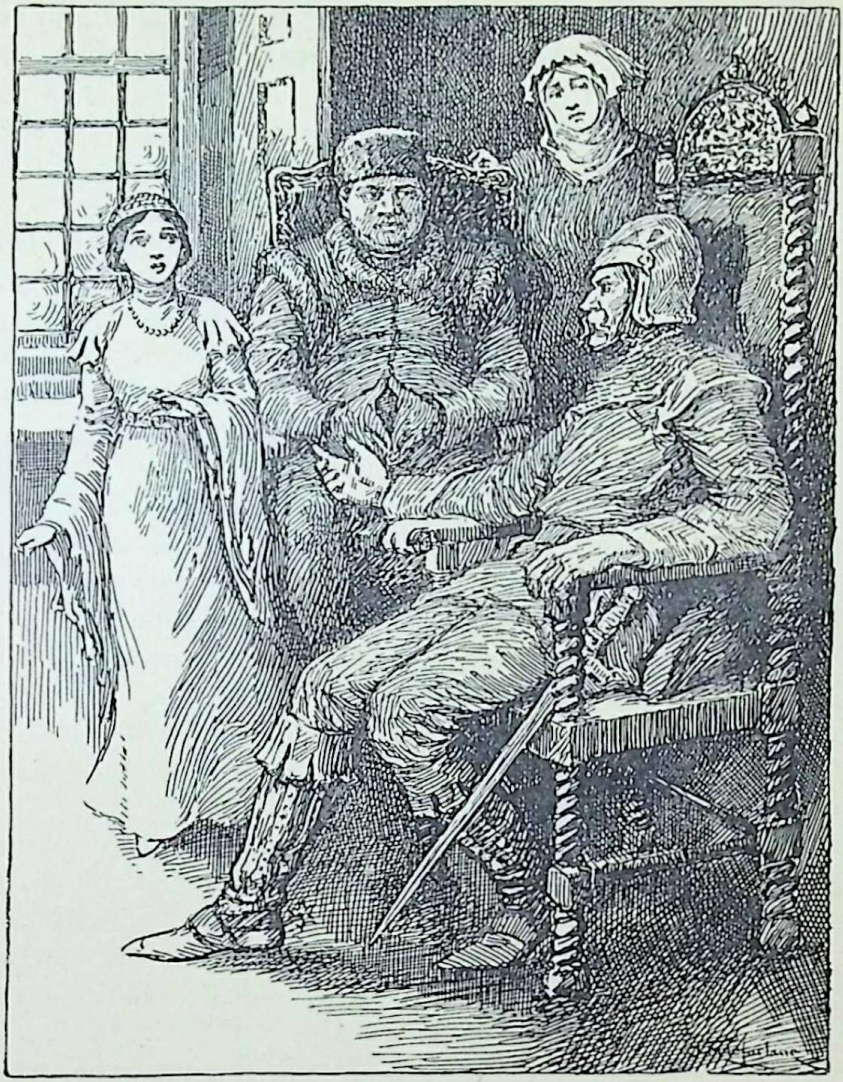

"Here, Camilla, girl, unlace my helmet!"

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tone of horrified dismay; and Christina would have dropped on the floor but for her uncle's sustaining hand.

"Let us come up to the gallery, and understand what you desire, brother," said Master Gottfried, gravely.

So saying he led the way up the oaken stairs to the gallery, the reception-room of the house. It had tapestry hangings to the wall, and cushions both to the carved chairs and deep windows. "Just as it was in the old man's time," said the soldier, throwing himself into the house-father's chair. "Here, Camilla, girl, unlace my helmet! What, know'st not how? What is a woman made for but to let a soldier free of his trappings? Thou hast done it! There! Now my boots," stretching out his legs.

"Hans shall draw off your boots, fair brother," began the dame; but poor Christina was already on her knees, pulling with her small quivering hands at the long steel-guarded boot. She further brought a pair of her uncle's furred slippers, while Hugh proceeded to explain that on his departure next day, his daughter must go with him.

"What would you with Christina, brother?" gravely asked Master Gottfried, while the frightened girl knelt on the floor, her head on her aunt's knees, trying to derive comfort from Dame Johanna's clasping hands, and vehement murmurs that they would not let their child be taken from them. Alas! these assurances were little in accord-dance with Hugh's rough reply, "And what is it to you what I do with mine own?"

"Only this, that, having bred her up as my child and intended heiress, I might have some voice in her future."

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Hugh was mainfestly somewhat influenced by the notion of his brother's wealth. "What, hast no child of thine own?" he asked.

"None, save in Paradise," answered Gottfried. "And thus, if Christina should remain with me, and be such as I would have her, then, brother, my wealth, after myself and my good wife, shall be hers, with due provision for thee, if thou shouldst weary of thy wild life. Otherwise," he added, "my poor savings should go to the completion of the Dome Kirk."

"And who told thee that I would do ought with the girl that should hinder her from being all you would have her?"

"I have heard nothing of thy designs as yet, brother Hugh, save that thou wouldst take her to Adlerstein, which men say is a nest of robbers."

"Aha! thou hast heard of Adlerstein! We have made the backs of your jolly merchants tingle as well as they could through their well-lined doublets! Ulm knows of Adlerstein, and the Debateable Ford!"

"It knows little to its credit," said Gottfried, gravely; "and it knows also that the Emperor is about to make a combination against all the Swabian robber-holds, and that such as join not in it will fare the worse."

"Let Kaiser Fritz catch his bear ere he sells its hide! He has never tried to mount the Eagle's Ladder! Why, man, Adlerstein might be held against five hundred men by sister Johanna! 'Tis a free barony, Master Gottfried, I tell thee—has never sworn allegiance to any. Baron

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Eberhard is as much a king on his own rock as Kaiser Fritz ever was of the Romans,[1] and, as to gainsaying our old Baron, one might as well leap over the abyss at once."

"Yes, those old free barons are pitiless tyrants," said Gottfried, "and I scarce think I can understand thee aright when I hear thee say thou wouldst carry thy daughter to such an abode."

"It is the Baron's command," returned Hugh. "Look you, they have had wondrous ill-luck with their children; only two are alive, my young Baron and my young Lady Ermentrude; and no wonder, you would say, if you could see the gracious lady Baroness, for she is more of a man than a woman. She is Adlerstein herself by birth, married her cousin, and she is prouder and harder than our old Baron himself—fitter far to handle shield than swaddled babe. And now our young lady has fallen into a pining waste, that 'tis a pity to see how her cheeks have fallen away, and how she mopes and fades. Now, the old Baron and her brother, they both dote on her, and would do anything for her. One day, when I looked into the chamber, I saw the poor sick maiden sitting on a high-backed chair, no rest for her feet, and the wind blowing keen all round her, and nothing to taste but scorched beef, or black bread and sour wine, and her mother rating her for foolish fancies that gave trouble. And, when my young Baron was bemoaning himself that we could not catch a Jew physician passing our way and bring up to cure her, I told him that no doctor could do for her what

[1] King of the Romans was a title of the German Emperor in those days.

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gentle tendance and nursing would, for what she needed was to be cosseted and laid down softly, and fed with broths and possets, and all that women know how to do with one another. A proper scowl and hard words I got from my gracious Lady, for wanting to put burgher[1] softness into an Adlerstein; but my old lord and his son listened at once. 'Thou hast a daughter?' quoth my lord, 'if thou wilt bring her here, and her care restores my daughter to health and strength, then will I make thee my body squire, with a right to a fourth part of all the spoil, and feed for two horses in my stable.' And young Baron Eberhard gave his word upon it."

Gottfried suggested that a sick nurse was the person required rather than a child like Christina; but, as Hugh truly observed, no nurse would go to Adlerstein, his daughter was at his own disposal, and her services would be repaid by personal advantages to himself.

The citizens of old Germany had the strongest ideas of parental authority, and regarded daughters as absolute property of their father; and Master Gottfried Sorel, though he alone had done the part of a parent to his niece, felt entirely unable to withstand the nearer claim.

At length Hugh retired to bed, and then there could be freedom of speech in the gallery, where the uncle and aunt held anxious counsel over the poor little dark-tressed head that still lay upon good Johanna's knees. The long discussion was at length ended by Christina herself, who

[1] The burghers were the traders, craftsmen, and merchants of the cities, and often very wealthy. The nobles despised them.

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rose from the floor, and stood before them with tearful eyes, and wet, flushed cheeks. "It must be thus," she said, in a low, but not unsteady voice. "I can bear it better since I have heard of the poor young lady, sick and with none to care for her. I will go with my father; it is my duty. I will do my best; but oh! uncle, so work with him that he may bring me back again."

"This from thee, Stina!" exclaimed her aunt; "from thee who art sick for fear of a trooper!"

"The saints will be with me, and you will pray for me," said Christina, still trembling.

"I tell thee, child, thou knowst not what these vile dens are. Heaven forbid thou shouldst!" exclaimed her aunt. "As if any duty could lead a silly helpless child among that herd of evil men, and women yet worse, with a good-for-nothing father, who would sell her for a good horse to the first dissolute young lord who fell in his way."

"I will take care that he knows it is worth his while to restore her safe to us. Nor do I think so ill of Hugh as thou dost, mother. And, for the rest, Heaven and the saints and her own discretion must be her guard till she shall return to us."

At length her uncle and aunt consented to let Christina go, and half the night was spent by the aunt and niece in preparing Christina's wardrobe for her sudden journey.

Many a tear was shed over the tokens of the little services she was wont to render, her half-done works and pleasant studies so suddenly broken off, and all the time Johanna was running on with a lecture on proper maidenly

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behaviour and giving Christina plentiful warnings against swaggering men-at-arms, drunken troopers, and, above all, against young barons, who most assuredly could mean no good by any burgher maiden. All this was interspersed with motherly advice how to treat the sick lady, and receipts for cordials and possets.

By the time Hugh Sorel rolled out from between his feather beds, and was about to don his greasy buff, a handsome new suit, and a pair of huge boots to correspond, had been laid by his bedside.

"Ho, ho! Master Gottfried," said he, as he stumbled downstairs, "I see thy game. Thou wouldst make it worth my while to visit the house at Ulm?"

"It shall be worth thy while, indeed, if thou bringest me back my white dove," was Gottfried's answer.

"And how if I bring her back with a strapping soldier son-in-law?" laughed Hugh. "What welcome should the fellow receive?"

"That would depend on what he might be," replied Gottfried; and Hugh, his love of tormenting a little allayed by satisfaction in his buff suit, and by an eye to a heavy purse that lay by his brother's hand on the table, added, "Little fear of that. Our fellows would look for lustier brides than yon little pale face. 'Tis whiter than ever this morning,—but no tears. That is my brave girl."

"Yes, father, I am ready to do your bidding," replied Christina, meekly.

"That is well, child. Mark me, no tears. So long as

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thou art good daughter to me, thou shalt find me good father to thee. Now canst sit behind me on old Nibelung ? "

" Christina has her own mule," replied her uncle, " without troubling Nibelung to carry double."

" Ho ! her own ! An overfed sort of a beast, that will turn restive at the first sight of the Eagle's Ladder ! However, he may carry her so far, and, if we cannot get him up the mountain, I shall know what to do with him," he muttered to himself.

Pale as death, but resolutely composed, Christina quietly went through her home partings ; while Johanna adjured her father by all that was sacred to be a true guardian and protector of the child.

Master Gottfried was going to ride as far as the confines of the free city's territory, and his round, sleek, cream-coloured palfrey was as great a contrast to raw-boned, wild-eyed Nibelung, as was the stately, substantial burgher to his lean, hungry-looking brother.

Close to her uncle Christina kept, as they took their way through the crooked streets out into the market-place, past the rising Dome Kirk, where the swarms of workmen took off their hats to the master-carver, under the arch of the tall and beautifully-sculptured bridge tower, and over the noble bridge across the Danube.

Her uncle spoke much, low and earnestly, to his brother. She knew he was trying to impress upon her father that he must look after her properly. But at last he drew his rein. " And now, my little one, the daughter of my heart, I must bid thee farewell," he said.

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Christina could not be restrained from springing from her mule, and kneeling on the grass to receive his blessing, her face hidden in her hands, that her father might not see her tears.

"The good God bless thee, my child," said Gottfried, "bless thee, and bring thee back in His own good time. Thou hast been a good child to us; be so to thine own father. Do thy work, and come back to us again."

The tears rained down his cheeks, as Christina's head lay on his bosom, and then with a last kiss he lifted her again on her mule, mounted his horse, and turned back to the city.

Hugh was merciful enough to let his daughter gaze long after the retreating figure ere he summoned her on. All day they rode, at first through meadow lands and then through more broken, open ground, where at mid-day they halted, and dined upon the plentiful fare with which Joanna had provided them.

The evening began to advance, and Christina was very weary, as the purple mountains began to look more distinct, and the ground was often in abrupt ascents. Her father hurried her on, for he must reach the Debateable Ford ere dark. It was twilight when they came to an open space, where, at the foot of thickly wooded rising ground, lay an expanse of turf and rich grass, through which a stream made its way, standing in a wide tranquil pool as if to rest after its rough course from the mountains. Above rose, like a dark wall, crag upon crag, peak on peak, in purple masses, blending with the sky; and Hugh, pointing

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upwards to a turreted point, apparently close above their heads, where a star of light was burning, told her that there was Adlerstein, and this was the Debateable Ford.

In fact, as he explained, while splashing through the shallow expanse, the stream had changed its course. It was the boundary between the lands of Schlangenwald and Adlerstein, but it had within the last sixty years burst forth in a flood, and had then declined to return to its own bed, but had flowed in a fresh channel to the right of the former one. The Barons von Adlerstein claimed the ground to the old channel, the Counts von Schlangenwald held that the river was the landmark; and the dispute had a great importance, for this was the passage of the Italian merchants on their way from Constance, and every load that was overthrown in the river was regarded as the lawful prey of the noble on whose banks the accident befell.

Any freight of goods was anxiously watched by both nobles, and it was not their fault if no disaster befell the travellers. Hugh talked bitterly of the Schlangenwald robbers, but manifestly did not breathe freely till his whole convoy were safe across both the wet and the dry channel.

At length the party arrived at a miserable hut which served for an inn, and here they halted for the night.

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CHAPTER II.

THE EYRIE.[1]

Christina Sorel had never before slept in such a place as the charcoal-burner's hut. It was a time when the imperial free towns of Germany had advanced nearly as far as those of Italy in civilization. The country immediately around them shared the benefits of their civilization, and the free peasant-proprietors lived in great ease and prosperity.

In the mountains, or around the castles, it was very different, for while the cities advanced in the power of self-government, and the education it conveyed, the nobles, especially those whose abodes were not easily accessible, were often practically under no government at all, and felt themselves accountable to no man. The Dukes had indeed accepted employment from the Kaiser as his generals, and had received rewards from him; the Counts were his judges; but the Barons were absolutely free, holding their own, and owing no duty, no office; poorer, but counting themselves infinitely higher, than the pensioners of the court. Of late years, however, the Barons had been for the most part obliged to give up their independence; but still, in the wilder and more mountainous parts of the country, some of the old families of unreduced, truly free Barons lingered, their hand against every man, every

[1] Eyrie: an eagle's nest.

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man's hand against them, and ever becoming more savage as their isolation and the general progress around them became greater. But in the fifteenth century the Kaiser Frederick III. was making his rule felt, and it was fast becoming apparent that the days of the independent baronies were numbered, and that the only choice that would soon be left them would be between making terms and being forcibly subdued. Von Adlerstein was one of the oldest of these free families.

And the wildness of their territory was what might be expected from their hostility to all outward influences. The inn was little more than a charcoal-burner's hut, hidden in the woods at the foot of the mountain, serving as a halting-place for the Baron's retainers ere they attempted the ascent. The inhabitants were allowed to ply their trade of charring wood in the forest on condition of supplying the castle with charcoal, and of affording a lodging to the followers on occasions like the present.

Christina's baggage-mule was left in the care of Jobst the charcoal-burner, while father and daughter continued their journey, Hugh going on foot beside Christina's mule. They proceeded along a dark path through oak and birch woods, constantly ascending, the opening glades showing steep, stony, torrent-furrowed ramparts of hillside above them, looking to Christina's eyes as if she were set to climb up the cathedral side like a snail or a fly.

"Look, child," said Hugh Sorel at last, "here is the view open. What think you of the Eagle's Nest?"

For, having passed beyond the region of wood they had

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come forth upon the mountain-side. The path they were upon turned round the shoulder of the mountain, and to the left, on a ledge of rock cut off apparently on their side by a deep ravine, and with a sheer precipice above and below it, stood a red stone pile, with one turret far above the rest.

"And this is Castle Adlerstein?" she exclaimed.

"That is Castle Adlerstein; and there shalt thou be in two hours' time, unless thou mak'st a fool of thyself."

It was well that Christina had resolution to prevent her making a fool of herself on the spot, for the thought of the pathway turned her so dizzy that she could only shut her eyes, trusting that her father did not see her terror. Soon the turn round to the side of the mountain was made, and the road became a mere track worn out on the turf.

When she ventured to look again, she perceived that the ravine was like an enormous crack, open on the mountain-side, and that the stream that formed the Debateable Ford flowed down the bottom of it. She now saw that the Eagle's Ladder was a succession of bare gigantic terraces of rock, on one of which stood the castle. It was no small mystery to her how it had ever been built, or how she was ever to get there.

The fearful steepness of the ground absorbed all Christina's attention. The road, or rather stairs, came down to the stream at the bottom of the ravine, and then went again on the other side up still more tremendous steeps, and Christina grew absolutely faint with giddiness at the abyss around her.

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Her father helped her as much as possible, and they neared the Castle. Presently a voice was heard above—"What, Sorel, hast brought her! Truda is wearying for her."

The words were in the most boorish dialect and pronunciation; and Christina was surprised to perceive by her father's manner that the speaker must be one of the lords of the castle. She looked up, and saw on the pathway above her a tall, large-framed young man, his skin dyed red with sun and wind, in odd contrast with his pale shaggy hair, moutsache, and beard, as though the weather had tanned the one and bleached the other. His dress was a still shabbier buff suit than her father had worn, but with a richly-embroidered belt sustaining a hunting-horn with finely-chased ornaments of tarnished silver, and an eagle's plume was fastened into his cap with a large gold Italian coin. He stared hard at the maiden, but gave her no sort of greeting. Christina was greatly surprised; she had been prepared to find the mountain lords dangerous ruffians, but she had expected the graces of courtesy and high birth; but, though there was certainly an air of command and freedom of bearing about the present specimen, his manners and speech were more uncouth than those of any newly-caught apprentice of her uncle.

By this time they had reached the level of the castle. Where the gateway was, a little river had been made to flow in a deep channel that had been hollowed out to serve as a moat. A temporary bridge had been laid across, for the drawbridge was out of order. Christina was told

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to dismount and cross on foot. The unrailed board, so close to the abyss, and with the wild water foaming above and below, was dreadful to her; and, though she durst not speak, she hung back with an involuntary shudder. The young Baron burst out into an unrestrained laugh—a still greater shock to her feelings; but at the same time he roughly took her hand, and almost dragged her across, saying, "City bred—ho, ho!" "Thanks, sir," she strove to say, but she was very near weeping with the terror and strangeness of all around.

The low-browed gateway opened before her, almost to her feelings like the gate of the grave, and she could not help putting up a silent prayer for protection, as she stepped under it, and came into the castle court—an ill-kept, ill-savoured stable-yard, with the piggeries opening into it. The Sorel family had brought cleanliness from Flanders, and Johanna was scrupulously dainty in all her appointments. Christina scarcely knew how she conveyed herself and her blue dress across the muddy stones to the next and still darker portal, under which a rough ill-hewn stair ascended. The stables, in fact, occupied the lower floor of the main building, and not till these stairs had ascended above them did they lead out into the castle hall. Here were voices—voices rude and harsh. There was a long table, with rough men-at-arms lounging about, who stared rudely at her; and at the upper end, by a great open chimney, sat an elderly man, more rugged in feature than his son; and yet with a shade more of breeding, and less of clownishness, in his voice and deportment. A tall

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darkly-robed woman stood beside him—it was her harsh tones that had so startled Christina as she entered. Her features had been handsome, but had become hardened into a grim wooden aspect; and with sinking spirits Christina paused and made her reverence, wishing she could sink beneath the stones of the pavement out of sight of these terrible personages.

"So that's the wench you have taken all this trouble for," was the lady Baroness Kunigunda's greeting. "She looks like another sick baby to nurse; but I'll have no trouble about her;—that is all. Take her up to Ermentrude; and thou, girl, have a care thou dost her will, and puttest none of thy city fancies into her head."

"And hark thee, girl," added the old Baron, sitting up. "So thou canst nurse her well, thou shalt have a new gown and a stout husband."

"That way," pointed the lady towards one of the four corner towers; and Christina moved doubtfully towards it. The younger Baron stepped before her, went striding two or three steps at a time up the turret stair, and, before Christina had wound her way up, she heard a thin, impatient voice say, "Thou saidst she was come, Ebbo."

"Yes, even so," she heard Baron Eberhard return; "but she is slow and townbred. She was afraid of crossing the moat." And then both laughed, so that Christina's cheeks tingled as she emerged from the turret into another vaulted room. "Here she is," quoth the brother; "now will she make thee quite well."

It was a very bare and desolate room, with no hangings

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to the rough stone walls, and scarcely any furniture, except a great carved bedstead, one wooden chair, a table, and some stools. On the bare floor, in front of the fire, her arm under her head, and a profusion of long hair falling round her, lay wearily a little figure, beside whom Sir Eberhard was kneeling on one knee.

"Here is my sister," said he, looking up to the newcomer. "They say you burgher women have ways of healing the sick. Look at her. Think you you can heal her?"

In an excess of dumb shyness Ermentrude half rose, and hid her face upon her brother's knee. "What, wilt not look at her?" he said, trying to raise her head; and then, holding out one of her wasted, feverish hands to Christina, he again asked, with a wistfulness that seemed strange from the large, tall man, almost ten years her elder, "Canst thou cure her, maiden?"

"I am no doctor, sir," replied Christina; "but I could, at least, make her more comfortable. The stone is too hard for her."

"I will not go away; I want the fire," murmured the sick girl, holding out her hands towards it, and shivering.

Christina quickly took off her own thick cloth mantle, well lined with dressed lambskins, laid it on the floor, rolled the collar of it over a small log of wood—there was no pillow—and showed an inviting couch in an instant. Ermentrude let her brother lay her down, and then was covered with the ample fold. She smiled as she turned up her thin, wasted face. "That is good," she said, but

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without thanks; and, feeling the soft lambswool: "Is that what you burgherwomen wear? Father is to give me a furred mantle, if only some court dame would pass the Debateable Ford. But the Schlangenwalders got the last before ever we could get down. Jobst was so stupid. He did not give us warning in time; but he is to be hanged next time if he does not."

Christina's blood curdled as she heard this speech in a weak little complaining tone. "Never mind, Truda," answered the brother kindly; "meantime I have kept all the wild catskins for thee, and may be this—this—*she* could sew them up into a mantle for thee."

"O let me see," cried the young lady eagerly; and Sir Eberhard fetched an armful of the beautiful brindled furs of the mountain cat. Ermentrude sat up, and looked at them with great interest; and thus her brother left her employed, and so much delighted that she had not flagged, when a great bell proclaimed that it was the time for the noontide meal.

Ermentrude, Christina found, meant to go down, but with no notion of first washing and making herself tidy. With all her hair streaming, down she went, and was so gladly welcomed by her father that it was plain that her presence was regarded as an unusual advance towards recovery. She was seized with eager curiosity at the sight of Christina's lute, which she must hear at once.

"Not now," said her mother, "there will be jangling and jingling enough by and by—meat now."

The whole establishment were taking their places—or

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rather tumbling into them. Hugh Sorel seated himself, and kept a place for Christina beside him. Otherwise she would hardly have had seat or food. Besides the family themselves, there were about a dozen men, all ruffianly-looking, and of much lower grade than her father, and three women. One, old Ursel, the wife of Hatto the forester, was a bent, worn, but not ill-looking woman, with a motherly face ; the younger ones were hard, bold creatures, from whom Christina felt a shrinking recoil. The meat was dressed by Ursel and her kitchen boy. From a great cauldron, goat's flesh and broth together were ladled out into wooden bowls. But Christina was not prepared for the unwashed condition of the bowls, nor for being obliged to share that of her father—far less for the absence of all blessing on the meal, and the coarse boisterousness of manners prevailing thereat. Hungry as she was, she did not find it easy to take food under these circumstances, and she was relieved when Ermentrude grew giddy, and was carried up stairs by her father, who laid her down upon her great bed, and left her to the attendance of Christina.

Nestled on her bed, Ermentrude insisted on hearing the lute, and Christina had to creep down to fetch it, with some other of her goods.

Low and softly Christina sung to the sick girl, who listened with a sort of rude wonder, and finally was lulled to sleep. Christina ventured to lay down her instrument and move towards the window, heavily barred with iron, and glazed with thick glass. To her great satisfaction it

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did not look out over the loathsome court, but over the opening of the ravine. Her eyes could rest themselves on the green meadow land below, and the smooth water of the Debateable Ford ; nay—far, far away, she thought she could track a silver line and something that might be a city. Her heart leapt towards it, but she was recalled by Ermentrude's fretfully imperious voice.

" I was only looking forth from the window, lady," she said, returning.

" Ah ! thou saw'st no travellers at the Ford ? " cried Ermentrude, starting up with lively interest.

" No, lady ; I was gazing at the far distance. Know you if it be indeed Ulm that we see from these windows ? "

" Ulm ? That is where thou comest from ? " said Ermentrude languidly.

" My happy home, with my dear uncle and aunt ! O, if I can but see it hence, it will be joy ! "

" I do not know. Let me see," said Ermentrude, rising ; but at the window her pale blue eyes gazed vacantly as if she did not know what she was looking at or for.

" Ah ! if the steeple of the Dome Kirk were but finished, I could not mistake it," said Christina. " How beautiful the white spire will look from hence."

" Dome Kirk ? " repeated Ermentrude ; " what is that ? "

Such an entire blank as the poor child's mind seemed to be was inconceivable to the maiden, who had been bred up in the busy hum of men, and carefully educated.

Ermentrude von Adlerstein had never gone beyond the

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charcoal-burner's hut on the one side, and the mountain village on the other; she had never seen more of life than the festival at the hermitage chapel there on Midsummer-day. Of the world she knew nothing; she hated the Schlangenwalds and her cousins the Wildschloss Adlersteins; she loved her father and her brother, and for the rest all she desired was finery taken from the travellers her father robbed. She knew nothing of religion, and as to the comforts, nay, almost the decencies of life, they were less known in that baronial castle than in any artisan's house at Ulm.

And this was Christina's charge, the least alien spirit in this dreadful castle of banishment! The young and old lords seemed to her savage bandits, who frightened her only less than did the proud sinister expression of the old lady, who evidently regarded the town-bred attendant as a contemptible interloper.

Long, long did the maiden weep and pray that night after Ermentrude had sunk to sleep, as she thought of her uncle and aunt in their home, the maids spinning and the prentices working as her uncle read aloud some grave good book; she could hardly restrain her sobs from awakening the young lady whose bed she was to share. But better thoughts came to comfort her, and with the hope that she might be able to do some good to this poor half-savage girl, Christina fell asleep.

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CHAPTER III.

THE FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF THE DEBATEABLE FORD.

LIFE in Castle Adlerstein was almost intolerable to Christina. Its squalor and coarseness, rendered absurd by haughtiness and violence, were almost inconceivable. Fortunately for her, the inmates of the castle resided almost wholly below stairs in the hall and kitchen, and the upper chamber was only used by Ermentrude. No one else wished to inhabit it.

Baroness Kunigunda cared little for her daughter. All her affection was centred on the strong and manly son, of whom she was proud. But the only daughter was the darling of both father and brother, who were ready to do anything to gratify the girl's sick fancies, and hailed with delight her pleasure in her new attendant.

It was well for Christina that Ursel was friendly. The poor child never crept down stairs without a trembling and shrinking of heart and nerves. Her father's authority guarded her from rude actions, but from rough tongues he neither could nor would guard her, though he did his best for her after his own views, and gradually brought her all her properties which she had left at the charcoal-burner's hut. Therewith she made a great difference in the aspect of the chamber. Wolf, deer, and sheep skins abounded ; and with these she covered the lower part of the bare grim walls, a great bear's hide was spread

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before the hearth, and cushions were made of these skins, and stuffed from Ursel's stores of feathers. All these embellishments delighted Ermentrude, who had never been made of so much importance. She let Christina braid her hair, bathe her, and arrange her dress, with sensations of comfort that were almost like health. To teach her to occupy herself was, however, as Christina soon found, in her present state, impossible. She was happiest when looking on at her attendant's busy hands, and asking to be sung to, or to hear tales of the active, busy scenes of the city life—the dresses, fairs, festivals, and guild processions.

The gentle nursing and the new interests improved her health, so that her father was delighted, and Christina began to hope for a return home. Sometimes the two girls would take the air, either, on still days, upon the battlements; or they would find their way to a grassy nook on the mountain-side, once going as far as the village chapel.

The elder Baron came little into Christina's way. He was kind to her, but she was dreadfully afraid of him, and, when he came to visit his daughter, shrank out of his notice as much as possible. His son she viewed as a thickwitted giant. Except that he was fairly conversant with the use of weapons, and had occasionally ridden beyond the shadow of his own mountain, his range was quite as limited as his sister's; and he had an equal scorn for all beyond it. He was unfailingly kind to his sister, and always eagerly followed up any suggestion Christina made for her pleasure. Much of his time was spent on the child, whose chief nurse and playmate he had been

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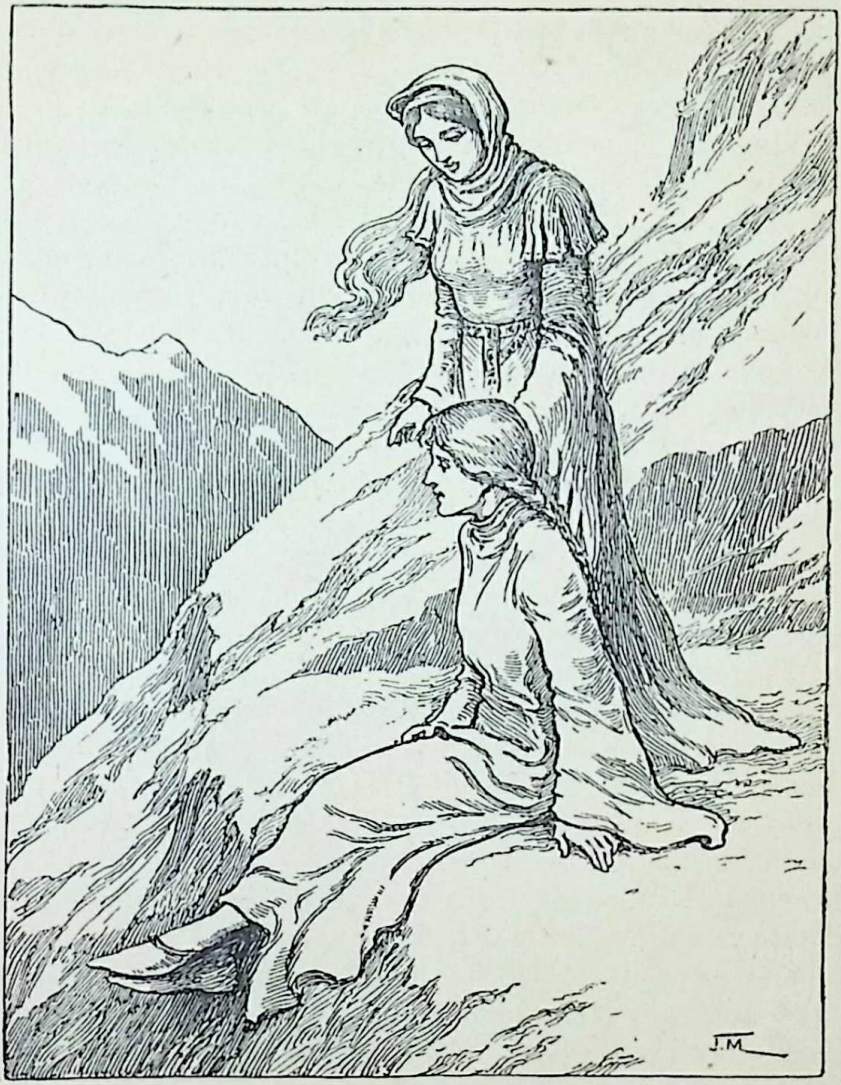

They would find their way to a grassy nook on the mountain-side.

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throughout her illness; and when she showed him Christina's arrangements, or repeated to him, in a wondering, blundering way the new tales she had heard, he used to listen with a pleased awkward amazement at his little Ermentrude's astonishing cleverness, joined sometimes with real interest, which was shown by his inquiries of Christina. He certainly did not admire the little, slight, pale bower-maiden, but he seemed to look upon her like some strange, almost uncanny, wise spirit out of some other sphere.

Christina had expected to see a ruffian, and had found a boor; but she was to learn that the ruffian existed in him. Notice came up to the castle of a convoy of waggons, and all was excitement. Men-at-arms were mustered, horses led down the Eagle's Ladder, and an ambush prepared in the woods.

The women of the castle were as excited as the men, and watched the attack from Ermentrude's window. The young lady herself was full of eager expectation, but she knew enough of her maiden to expect no sympathy from her. Christina crept into the turret room in the corner of Ermentrude's chamber, unable to withdraw her eyes from the sight, trembling, weeping, praying, longing for power to give a warning signal. She could see the waggons in mid-stream. She saw the overthrow, the struggle, the flight of a few scattered dark figures on the farther side, the drawing out of the goods on the nearer. She was glad that Ermentrude went down with her mother to watch the return of the victors. Presently she heard Sir Eber-

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hard's heavy tread, as he carried his sister up stairs. Ermentrude went up at once to Christina.

"After all there was little for us!" she said. "It was only a wain of wine barrels; and now will the drunkards down stairs make good cheer. But Ebbo could only win for me this gold chain and medal which was round the old merchant's neck."

"Was he slain?" Christina asked with pale lips.

"I only know I did not kill him," returned the Baron; "I had him down and got the prize, and that was enough for me."

"But he has brought thee something, Stina," continued Ermentrude. "Show it to her, brother."

"My father sends you this for your care of my sister," said Eberhard, holding out a brooch that had doubtless fastened the band of the unfortunate wine-merchant's bonnet.

"Thanks, sir; but, indeed, I may not take it," said Christina, turning crimson, and drawing back.

"So!" he exclaimed, in amaze; then bethinking himself, —"They are no townsfolk of yours, but Constance cowards."

"Take it, take it, Stina, or you will anger my father," added Ermentrude.

"No, lady, I thank the Barons both, but it were sin in me," said Christina, with trembling voice.

"Look you," said Eberhard; "we have the full right —'tis an old-established right—to all the goods of every wayfarer that may be overthrown in our river—as I am a true knight!" he added earnestly.

"A true knight!" repeated Christina, pushed hard, and

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very indignant in all her terror. "The true knight's part is to aid, not rob, the weak." And the dark eyes flashed a vivid light.

"Christina!" exclaimed Ermentrude in amazement, "know you what you have said?—that Eberhard is no true knight!"

He meanwhile stood silent, utterly taken by surprise.

"I cannot help it, Lady Ermentrude," said Christina, with trembling lips, and eyes filling with tears. "You may drive me from the castle—I only long to be away from it; but I cannot stain my soul by saying that spoil and rapine are the deeds of a true knight."

"My mother will beat you," cried Ermentrude passionately, ready to fly to the head of the stairs; but her brother laid his hand upon her.

"Tush, Truda; keep thy tongue still, child! What does it hurt me?"

And he turned on his heels and went down stairs. Christina crept into her turret, weeping bitterly. Presently Ermentrude peeped in.

"Stina, Stina, don't cry; I will not tell my mother! Come out! No one shall beat you."

"That is not what I wept for, lady," said Christina. "I do not think you would bring harm on me. But oh! I would I were at home! I grieve for the bloodshed that I must see and may not hinder, and for that poor merchant."

"Oh," said Ermentrude, "you need not fear for him! I saw his own folk return and lift him up. But what is he to thee or to us?"

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"I am a burgher maid, lady," said Christina, recovering herself, and aware that it was of no use to explain her feelings to poor little Ermentrude.

Still she could not but tremble at the thought of her speech, and went down to supper in greater trepidation than usual. But, fortunately, the whole establishment was in a state of noisy triumph over the excellence of the French wine they had captured, so that she slipped into her seat unobserved.

Every available drinking-horn and cup was full. Ermentrude was presented with draughts by both father and brother. The mirth went on rough and loud, and Christina felt this the worst of all the miserable meals she had partaken of at the castle. Ermentrude, too, was soon in such a state of excitement that Christina was bitterly ashamed and grieved for her.

Presently, however, Ermentrude laid down her head and began to cry—violent headache had come on—and her brother took her in his arms to carry her up the stairs; but his step was far from steady; he stumbled more than once on the steps, shook and frightened his sister, and set her down weeping petulantly. And then came a terrible moment for Christina; he swore that she was a lovely maiden, and that she must give him a kiss for forgiving her words to him.

A house full of intoxicated men, no living creature to protect her, scarce even her father! But extremity of terror gave her strength. She spoke resolutely—

"Sir Eberhard, your sister is ill—you are in no

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state to be here. Go down at once, nor insult a free maiden."

Probably the low-toned softness of the voice, so utterly different from the shrill wrangling notes of all the other women he had known, took him by surprise. He was still sober enough to be subdued by her manner; he staggered to the stairs, Christina rushed after him, closed the heavy door with all her force, fastened it inside, and would have sunk down to weep but for Ermentrude's peevish wail of distress.

Happily Ermentrude was too ill to resent the exclusion of her brother; so the door remained shut, and Christina resolved that she would so keep it while the wine lasted. Nobody came near the maidens but Ursel, and she described one continued orgie that made Christina shudder again with fear and disgust. Those below revelled without interval, except for sleep; and when they had slept they returned again to the liquor. Yet there might have been worse even than this; for old Ursel whispered that at the bottom of the stairs there was a trap-door. Did Christina know what it covered? It was an oubliette.[1] There was once a Strasburg armourer who had refused ransom, and talked of appealing to the Kaiser. He trod on that door and —— Ursel pointed downwards. "But since that time," she said, "my young lord has never brought home a prisoner."

Ermentrude was soon restlessly pining for her brother;

[1] Oubliette: *i.e.* a secret trap-door over a deep pit, or over the moat of a castle.

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and when her father came up to see her, received him with scant welcome, and entreaties for Ebbo. She knew she should be better if she might only sit on his knee, and lay her head on his shoulder. The old Baron went down, promising that her brother should come.

With a fluttering heart Christina awaited the noble whom she had perhaps insulted, and whose advances had more certainly insulted her. She longed to flee out of sight, when his heavy tread was heard; but this she could not do, for Ermentrude was leaning against her. Somehow, Eberhard's step was less assured than usual; he absolutely knocked at the door; and, when he came in, he acknowledged her by a slight inclination of the head. If she only had known it, this was the first time that head had ever been bent to any being, human or Divine; but all she did perceive was that Sir Eberhard was desperately shy and sheepish, and extremely ashamed, not indeed of his drunken bout, which would have been, even to a much tamer German baron, only a happy accident, but of having tried to kiss her.

He was much grieved to perceive how ill Ermentrude looked, and gave himself up to fondling and comforting her; and in a few days more, in their common cares for the sister, Christina lost her newly-acquired horror of the brother, while she was almost amused by the increased awe of herself shown by this huge robber baron.

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CHAPTER IV.

SPRINGTIME.

ERMENTRUDE never recovered from the effects of that unfortunate carouse. All through the winter she grew weaker and weaker; and Christina was obliged to abandon any hope of returning home, for Ermentrude needed more and more tenderness and care. Christina's resources were unfailing. She carved first a set of draughts, then one of chessmen for Ermentrude's amusement, and taught her to play the games; told her stories and legends from her store of books, and, most of all, she strove to implant in the feeble girl's mind some knowledge of the Christian truths, so that she might not leave the world as ignorant of hope and faith as were her heathen forefathers.

Christina had now no hope that Ermentrude would recover. She could not cure her, but she could comfort, cheer, and soften. She heartily loved her charge, and now Ermentrude repaid her care. The sick girl was infinitely softened in manner, treated her parents with respect, and even thanked old Ursel; her feeling towards her brother was real, tender affection, while the love bestowed on Christina was touching in the extreme.

Baron von Adlerstein now often spoke of the advantage it would be to the family if he could persuade himself to make that submission to the Kaiser which circumstances were rendering more and more inevitable. Baron Eber-

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hard was more strongly convinced than his father of the necessity for submission. Hugh Sorel's reports of what he heard at Ulm had shown that the league that had been discussed at Regensburg was far more formidable than anything that had ever previously threatened Castle Adlerstein, and that if the Count von Schlangenwald joined in the coalition, there would be private malice to direct its efforts against the Adlerstein family.

Nor did Eberhard look on the submission with the sullen rage and grief that his father felt. What the young Baron heard in his sister's room was awakening in him a sense of the poorness and narrowness of his present life. Partly from Ermentrude, partly from her attendant, he had learnt that life had better things to offer than independence on these bare rocks, and that homage to the Kaiser might open the way to higher and worthier exploits than preying upon overturned waggons.

The legends which Christina told to his sister were revelations to him of what she meant by a true knight—the lion in war, the lamb in peace; and opened his mind to aspirations for intercourse with his fellows, for an honourable name, and for esteem such as was paid to these good knights. Nay, as Ermentrude said, stroking his cheek, "Some day wilt thou be another Good Baron Eberhard, like our ancestor, whom all the country-side loved, and who gave bread at the castle-gate to all that hungered."

Eberhard spent many hours talking to Ermentrude and Christina. All Christina's fear of him was gone. As

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long as there was no liquor in the house, and he was his true self, she felt him to be a kind friend, bound to her by strong sympathy in the love and care for his sister.

With the melting of the snow, it first fully dawned upon the family that, for the little daughter of the house, spring was not bringing recovery.

Then it was that Sir Eberhard first really listened to Ermentrude's entreaty that she might not die without a priest, and comforted her by passing his word to her that he would bring her one of the priests who came on great days to say mass at the Blessed Friedmund's hermitage chapel. It was Whitsuntide when this promise was fulfilled, and Eberhard summoned Father Norbert to attend the dying girl.

Father Norbert, a sturdy Switzer, climbed after his guide through the most rugged passages of Eberhard's shortest and most perpendicular cut without a moment's hesitation. The young Baron turned for a moment, when the level of the castle had been gained, to see whether he were following, then came to a sudden, speechless pause.

On the white masses of vapour that floated on the opposite side of the mountain was traced a gigantic shadowy outline of a hermit, with head bent eagerly forward, and arm outstretched.

The monk crossed himself. Eberhard stood still for a moment, and then said, hoarsely,—"The Blessed Friedmund![1] He is come for her;" then strode on, followed by Father Norbert.

[1] St. Friedmund was the patron saint of the Adlerstein family.

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Sir Eberhard led the way up the turret stairs to the open door, and the monk entered the death-chamber. The elder Baron sat near the fire. His wife stood near the foot of the bed, her stern, harsh features somewhat softened by the feelings of the moment.

For these Father Norbert was prepared; but he little expected to meet such a welcome as beamed on him from the soft, dark eyes of the little white-cheeked maiden who sat on the bed, holding the sufferer in her arms. Still less had he anticipated the serene blessedness that sat on the wasted features of the dying girl.

She smiled a smile of joy, and thanked her brother. Her father scarcely lifted his head, her mother made a rigid curtsey, and laid her hand over the old Baron's shoulder. "Come away, father," she said; "he is going to pray with her, and make her too holy for the like of us to touch."

The old man rose up, and stepped towards his child. Ermentrude held out her arms to him, and murmured—

"Father, father, pardon me; I would have been a better daughter if I had only known——" He gathered her in his arms; he was quite past speaking; he only gave her repeated kisses, and laid her down on her pillows, then rushed to the door, and the passionate sobs of the strong man's uncontrolled nature might be heard upon the stair.

The mother followed, but when Eberhard moved to go, she turned to the priest, and said, imploringly, "Not far, not far! Oh! let them," pointing to Eberhard and Christina, "let them not be quite out of sight!"

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"Out of hearing is all that is needed, daughter," replied the priest; Christina moved towards the empty north turret, and Eberhard followed her. Gravely and sadly both stood there. Christina's eyes filled with tears as Eberhard told, under his breath, of the vision he had seen. Her eyes expended with awe. "It was the Blessed Friedmund," said Eberhard. "Never hath he so greeted one of our race since the pious Baroness Hildegarde. Maiden, hast thou brought us back a blessing?"

"Ah! well may she be blessed—well may the saints stoop to greet her," murmured Christina, scarcely able to control her sobs.

Father Norbert came towards them. The simple confession had been heard, and he sought the aid of Christina in performing the last service of the Church.

"Maiden," he said to her, "thou hast done a great and blessed work, such as many a priest might envy thee."

Eberhard stood by during the final services. True, he comprehended little of their meaning, but he listened while Christina made her responses and took her part with deep fervour. Ermentrude lay calm, and, as it were, already rapt into a higher world, lighting up at the German portions of the service which she could understand.

She was all but gone when the last rites were completed, and they could only stand round her, watching the last flutterings of the breath, the window thrown wide open that nothing might impede the passage of the soul to the blue vault above.

The priest spoke the beautiful last words of the service

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for the dying, "Depart, O Christian soul." There was a faint gesture from Ermentrude for Christina to lift her in her arms—a sign to bend down and kiss her brow—but her last look was for her brother, her last murmur, "Come after me; be the Good Baron Ebbo."

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG BARON.

ERMENTRUDE VON ADLERSTEIN was buried in the hermitage chapel, and Christina Sorel's work was done.

She entreated her father to take her home, but she received a sharp answer that it was impossible; the Schlangenwald troopers were besetting all the roads; moreover the Ulm burghers had taken the capture of the Constance wine in such dudgeon that for a retainer of Adlerstein to show himself in the streets would be absolutely dangerous. He promised to do what he could later, and with this Christina must needs content herself.

Christina's position in that rude household was now a difficult one. No one interfered with her, and she was only obliged to join the rest at meals, but she could not suddenly break off that friendship with the young Baron which his sister's illness had brought about. All through that sad time she had been his comforter, assistant, director,—but this intimacy ought not to go on when she

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was no longer Ermentrude's attendant. The thought of Aunt Johanna's counsels flashed upon her, reminding her of the guard she must keep over her conduct if she would still keep her aunt's good opinion. The very thought of deserving Johanna's reproof made her cheeks flame, and the next time she heard Sir Eberhard's tread on the stair, she fled hastily into her own chamber. Presently Sir Eberhard called her by name, and she felt it needful to open the door and answer, respectfully,

"What would you, my lord?" "Come and sit down, Christina," he said, dragging a chair nearer the hearth. "My heart is sore, and I cannot bear the din below. Tell me where my sister is flown."

"Ah! sir; pardon me. I must to the kitchen," said Christina.

"Must? And wherefore? Thou hast nought to do there; speak truth! Why not stay with me?" and his great light eyes opened wide.

"A burgher maid may not sit down with a noble baron."

"The devil! Has my mother been plaguing thee, child?"

"No, my lord," said Christina, "she thinks not of me; but it becomes me the more to be discreet."

"And you would not have me come here!" he said, with a wistful tone of reproach.

"I have no power to forbid you; but if you do, I must betake me to Ursel in the kitchen," said Christina, very low, trembling and half choked.

"Among the rude wenches there!" he cried, starting

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up. "Nay, nay, that shall not be! Rather will I go. But this is very cruel of thee, maiden," he added, lingering, "when I give thee my knightly word that I will do naught to offend thee."

"It must not be, my lord," returned Christina, with drooping, blushing face; "it would not be maidenly in me. Oh, my lord, you are kind and generous, make it not hard for me to do what is right."

"Kind and generous?" said Eberhard. "This from you, who told me once I was no true knight!"

"I shall call you a true knight with all my heart," cried Christina, the tears rushing into her eyes, "if you will respect my weakness and loneliness."

He stood up again, as if to move away; then paused, and, twisting his gold chain, said, "And how am I ever to be what the happy one bade me, if you will not show me how?"

"My error would never show you the right," said Christina, with a strong effort at firmness, and retreated to her room.

It had been a hard struggle, and it had brought home to poor Christina a fact which she realised with dismay—that she was beginning to love the young Baron. Was this the reason that, while she longed to go back to Ulm, she had lately felt so great a dislike to the thought of a burgher marriage, turning instead to thoughts of a convent life? Was it love that made the few words exchanged with Eberhard at meal-times worth all the rest of the day to her? In spirit at least poor little Christina had neglected

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all Aunt Johanna's warnings against young barons. She wept, and resolved, and prayed, cruelly ashamed of every start of joy or pain that the sight of Eberhard cost her. He had always sat next her at meals, and the custom continued, though sometimes he treated her with sullen silence, sometimes spoke a few friendly words; but he observed, better than she could have expected, her test of his true knighthood, and never again forced himself into her room, though now and then he came to the door with flowers or mountain strawberries, always delaying so long that she was forced to be resolute, and shut the door on him at last.

Once there was to be a mass at the chapel, and Hugh Sorel informed his daughter that he would take her thereto. To her amazement and pleasure, the young Baron was at church, and when on the way home, he walked beside her mule, she could see no need of sending him away.

He had never been taught the conventionalities of life, and, when he saw that Hugh Sorel's presence had obtained him this favour, he wistfully asked, "Christina, if I bring your father with me, will you not let me in?"

"Entreat me not, my lord," she answered, with fluttering breath.

She felt sure she was right in this decision, when she encountered her father's broad grin of surprise and diversion at seeing the young Baron help her to dismount. She saw at once that Hugh Sorel would see no harm in his daughter's receiving attentions from a man whose rank would not permit him to marry her.

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The effect was a new, urgent, and most piteous entreaty, that Sorel would find means of sending her home. Hugh was touched by this appeal, and he likewise recollected how much it was for his own interest that his brother should be satisfied with the care he took of his daughter. He bethought him that, among the merchants who frequented the Midsummer Fair at the Blessed Friedmund's Wake, a safe escort might be found to take her back to Ulm.

Sorel did not understand the attraction which his daughter's character had for Baron von Adlerstein. It was the power and purity of this timid, fragile creature, that had struck the young noble. With all their brutal manners reverence for a lofty female nature was implanted in the German character, and this reverence in Eberhard bowed at the feet of the pure gentle maiden, so strong yet so weak, so wistful and entreating even in her resolution, the first being in whom he had ever seen piety or goodness.

There was almost a fear mingled with his reverence, and he durst not push her so hard as to offend her, and excite the anger or the grief that he alike dreaded. And it was on feeble little Christina, yielding in heart, though not in will, that it depended to preserve this reverence, and return unharmed from this castle, more perilous now than ever.

Midsummer Day came at length and St. Friedmund's Wake with it. But Christina did not go back to Ulm, for the young Baron followed her to the Fair, and when he had sent her father out of the way, he married her in the hermit's chapel. As they were returning home Eberhard

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told her that she must let no one know of the marriage, for if the old Baroness heard of it she would have Christina thrown down the oubliette, or burnt as a witch. When he had made his submission to the Kaiser Eberhard intended to take service with the Imperial troops, then he would send for Christina and acknowledge her. Poor Christina was dismayed at the idea of this secrecy even from her uncle and aunt, but she was forced to obey Eberhard's wishes, and found comfort in the thought that now she had a right to love Sir Eberhard as much as she pleased.

She was much depressed by the fact that when Sir Eberhard had set the Midsummer Burning Wheel rolling down the hill on the night of the Fair, it only ran about a third of its course, then fell over and lay, smoking and charring, half burnt, to the great concern of the villagers, for it was considered a very bad omen for the year if the wheel did not run its full course, or was extinguished. Christina felt very unhappy about it, and feared that her marriage would not be a lucky one, though she prayed earnestly for God's blessing on herself and her husband.

CHAPTER VI.

WIFE AND WIDOW.

THE poor little unowned bride had more to endure than she had at first imagined. When she heard that the marriage was to be kept secret she thought that Eberhard

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would be as discreet in his conduct to her as before ; but he saw no reason why he should not now talk openly with her, and could not understand the shame and confusion he was bringing on her by his notice of her. He knew that no soul would dream of his actually marrying a burgher maid, also that his mother would not trouble to harm a girl with whom she thought he was merely amusing himself, and he was surprised by the agony of grief and shame with which Christina slowly comprehended the situation.

There was no help for it. Were the marriage known the oubliette would certainly be the portion of the low-born girl who had dared to marry the heir of the Adlersteins. And her father would probably have been hung from the highest tower. Christina consoled herself with the hope that he knew all, for, with a broad grin that had made her blush painfully, he had said he hoped she did not *now* want to go back to Ulm.

Eberhard's love and reverence were undiminished, and the time spent with him would have been perfectly happy could she ever have shaken off her feeling of anxiety and alarm ; but his absences from the castle were very terrible to her, for the other women of the household, quick to perceive that she no longer repelled him, treated her with a familiarity, sometimes coarse, sometimes spiteful, always hateful and degrading.

This state of things lasted much longer than there had been reason to expect at the time of the marriage. The two Barons then intended to set out at once to make their long talked of submission to the Emperor at Ratisbon ;

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but, from various reasons, the expedition was again and again put off, and did not actually take place till late in September.

Poor Christina entreated to be sent to Ulm with an avowal of her marriage to her uncle and aunt, but of this Eberhard would not hear. He meant to enrol himself in the Imperial troops, and he would then fetch or send for his wife. He longed to leave her father at home, to be some protection to her, but Hugh Sorel was so much the most intelligent and skilful of the retainers as to be absolutely indispensable to the party. It numbered about ten men-at-arms, only three being left at home to garrison the castle. The Barons were not likely to be absent more than a week or ten days—a grievous length of time, poor Christina thought, as she stood straining her eyes on the top of the watch-tower, to watch them as far as possible along the plain.

Her heart was very sad, and the omen of the burning wheel so continually haunted her that even in her sleep that night she saw its brief course repeated, beheld its rapid fall and extinction, and then tracked the course of the sparks that darted from it, one rising and gleaming high in air till it shone like a star, another pursuing a fitful and irregular, but still bright course amid the dry grass on the hill-side, just as she had indeed watched some of the sparks on that night.

The noontide meal was still in progress when one of the maids who had been sent to fetch beer from the cellar came back with startled looks, and the exclamation,

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"There is the Schneiderlein riding up the Eagle's Ladder upon Baron Ebbo's white mare!"

All the women sprang up together, and rushed to the window, whence they could recognize both man and horse; and presently it became plain that both were stained with blood, weary, and spent; indeed, nothing but extreme exhaustion would have induced the man-at-arms to trust the tired, stumbling horse up such a perilous path.

Loud were the exclamations of terror and dismay, as the women rushed to meet the Schneiderlein, Christina in the rear. The throng was at the foot of the hall steps, just as the trooper reached the arched entrance. His comrade Hans took his bridle, and almost lifted him from his horse; he reeled and stumbled as, pale, battered, and bleeding, he tried to advance to Baroness Kunigunda, and, in answer to her hasty question, faltered out, "Ill news, gracious lady. We have been set upon by the accursed Schlangenwalders, and I am the only living man left."

Christina scarce heard even these last words; she sank back on the stone steps in a deathlike swoon.

When she came to herself she was lying on her bed, Ursel and Elsa, another of the women, busy over her, and Ursel's voice was saying, "Ah, she is coming round. Look up, sweet lady, and fear not. You are our gracious Lady Baroness."

"Is he here? O, has he said so? O, let me see him—Sir Eberhard," faintly cried Christina.

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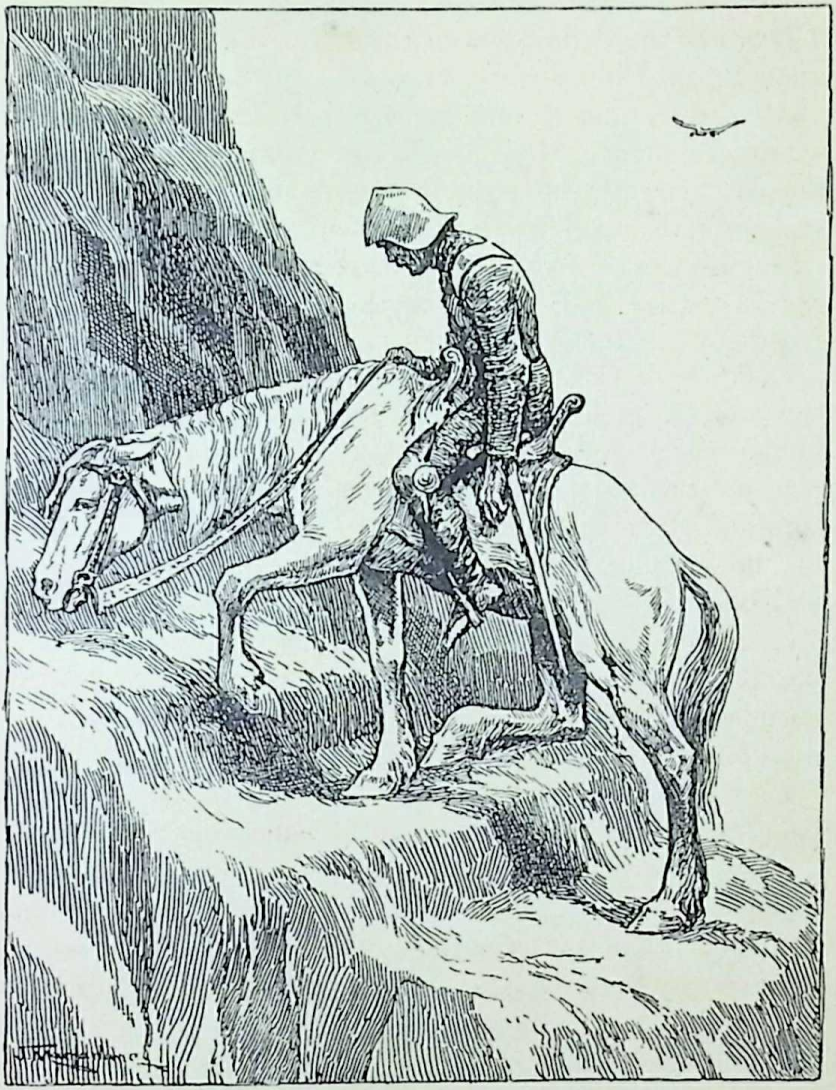

Both were stained with blood, weary, and spent.

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"Ah, no, no," said the old woman; "but see here," and she lifted up Christina's hand, and showed her the ring on the finger. Her dress had been evidently loosened in her swoon, and her ring found and put in its place. "There, you can hold up your head with the best of them; he took care of that—my dear young Baron, the boy that I nursed," and the old woman's burst of tears brought back the truth to Christina's reviving senses.

"Oh, tell me," she said, trying to raise herself, "was it indeed so? O say it was not as he said!"

"Ah, woe's me, woe's me, that it was even so," lamented Ursel; "but oh, be still, look not so wild, dear lady. The dear, true-hearted young lord, he spent his last breath in owning you for his true lady, and in bidding us cherish you and our young baron that is to be. And the gracious lady below—she owns you; there is no fear of her now; so vex not yourself, dearest, most gracious lady."

Christina entreated to be told all, lying still, but gazing at Ursel with piteous bewildered eyes. Ursel and Elsa helping one another out, tried to tell her, but they were much confused; all they knew was that the party had been surprised at night in a village inn by the Schlangenwalders, and all slain, though the young Baron had lived long enough to charge the Schneiderlein with his commendation of his wife to his mother.

"Oh, let me see the Schneiderlein," implored Christina. But the trooper was too spent to come.

"I will go to him," said Christina, and, revived by the sense of being wanted, she moved at once to the turret,

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where she kept some rag and some ointment, and, descending the stairs, made her way to the kitchen, where she found the man-at-arms seated on a rough settle, his head and wounded arm resting on the table, while groans of pain were mingled with curses on the stupid awkward girls who surrounded him.

Pity and the instinct of affording relief must needs come before even the desire to hear of her husband's fate; and, as the trooper hastily tried to gather himself up, and rise with tokens of respect, she bade him remain still, while she dressed his wounds. In fact, she at once perceived that he was in no condition to give a clear account of anything, he was so completely worn out, and in so much suffering. She bade at once that some water should be heated, and some of the broth of the dinner set on the fire; then with soft, light fingers, she cut away the sleeve, showing the arm not broken, but badly wounded. So tender was her touch, that he scarcely winced or moaned under her hand; and, when she bathed the wound with the warm water, the relief was such that the wearied man absolutely slumbered while she dressed and bandaged the arm. Taking the basin of soup, she then fed her patient as he leant back in the corner of the settle; after a few spoonfuls the light and life came back to his eye, and he broke out, "Thanks, thanks, gracious lady! This is the Lady Baroness for me! My young lord was the only wise man! Thanks, lady; now am I my own man again. It had been long ere the old Baroness had done so much for me! I am your man, lady, for life or death!" And,

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before she knew what he was about, the gigantic Schneiderlein had slid down on his knees, seized her hand, and kissed it—the first act of homage to her rank, but most startling and distressing to her. "Nay," she faltered, "prithee do not; thou must rest. Only if—if thou canst only tell me if he, my own dear lord, sent me any greeting, I would wait to hear the rest till thou hast slept."

But the revived trooper would begin at the beginning, so allowing Ursel to seat her on the bench opposite to his settle, Christina heard his narrative like one in a dream. The party had arrived safely at Jacob Müller's inn, and had halted there to drink, when suddenly the inn was surrounded by an overpowering number of Schlangenwalders, headed by the Count himself. The disadvantage of the Adlesteiners, half drunk, and greatly inferior in numbers, was great; a desperate fight followed, in which all the Adlersteiners were killed save the Schneiderlein, who was captured, and the young Baron, who, terribly wounded, was flung into a corner of the inn to die.

The victors celebrated their triumph by a drinking bout, which ended in their sinking into a heavy sleep. This enabled the Schneiderlein to make his escape, at the earnest entreaty of his young lord. With a last effort the dying Eberhard thrust his own sword into his follower's hand, whispering with difficulty: "Go home; tell my mother—all the world—that Christina Sorel is my wife, wedded on the Friedmund Wake by Friar Peter of Offingen, and if she should bear a child, he is my true and lawful heir. My sword for him—my love to her. And if my

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mother would not be haunted by me, let her take care of her." These were his last words. A choking rush of blood came on, and he sank back senseless. The Schneiderlein laid him down, crossed his hands, wiped the blood from his face; then unwillingly left him. Creeping outside, he managed to seize Sir Eberhard's white mare, and so made his escape.

Such was the story of the Schneiderlein, and all that was left to Christina was the picture of her husband's dying effort to guard her, of those long hours of speechless agony on the floor of the inn, and how great must have been his fears for her. Sad and overcome, yet her heart yearned over the mother who had lost both husband and son; and all her fears of the dread Baroness could not prevent her from going to her.

The Baroness sat by the chimney, rocking herself to and fro. She made a gesture of repulsion as Christina approached, but the girl stepped nearer, knelt, and, clasping her hands, said, "Your pardon, lady."

"Pardon!" returned the harsh voice, even harsher for very grief, "thou hast naught to fear, girl. As things stand, I cannot punish thee. Come here, wench," and Christina underwent a series of sharp searching questions on the evidences of her marriage.

"So," ended the old lady, "since better may not be, we must own thee. Hark ye all, this is the Lady Baroness, Baron Eberhard's widow, to be honoured as such," she added, raising her voice. "There, girl, thou hast what thou didst strive for. Is not that enough?"

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"Alas! lady," said Christina, her eyes swimming in tears, "I would fain have striven to be a comforter to you."

"What! to bewitch me as thou didst my poor son and daughter, and well-nigh my lord himself! Girl! Girl! Thou know'st I cannot burn thee now; but away with thee; try not my patience too far."

And, more desolate than ever, the crushed and broken-hearted Christina, a widow before she had been owned a wife, returned to her own room.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR KASIMIR AND CHRISTINA.

Now that the old Baroness knew that Christina was her son's wife, she would not allow her to go back to Ulm, but kept her in the castle, where she treated her very unkindly. The servants were devoted to Christina, and at a word from her would have rebelled against Kunigunda, but Christina did not care what happened to her, and spent many hours grieving for her husband and her father. Through the winter nothing was heard of the Schlangenwalders, or of Sir Kasimir Wildschloss, the next heir to Adlerstein. Through Father Norbert they learned that Count Schlangenwald had carried off the bodies of the two Barons, and they could not be recovered. Prayers were said for their souls, but Christina had more comfort in thinking of the beginnings of good that she had seen in

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her Eberhard than in the prayers. He became to her a very tender memory.

On Easter Day, twin sons were born to Christina. On the next day Sir Kasimir Wildschloss arrived at Adlerstein to take possession, as he thought, of his inheritance, and was much surprised to hear that the young Baron had left an heir. At first he suspected a cheat, but when he saw Christina he saw that she could not be an impostor, and, charmed by her sweetness and gentleness, he acknowledged the claims of the twins, and promised to befriend them.

Christina told him of the submission the old Baron and his son had set out to make to the Kaiser, and Sir Kasimir said he would represent the facts to the Emperor, and would undertake that the question of homage should stand over until Christina's son should be old enough to render it himself. But there must be no raids on travellers at the Ford, or the Emperor would consider the Adlerstein estates as forfeited to him. Christina promised in her son's name to observe these conditions, and Sir Kasimir—a handsome and courtly man, in the Emperor's service, a great contrast to his wild Adlerstein cousins—then offered to be godfather to the baby twins. Christina gratefully accepted his offer, the twins were baptised by Father Norbert, the elder being called Eberhard, and the younger Friedmund, after the patron saint of the Adlerstein family.

During the ceremony Ursel whispered to Christina that the old Baroness intended to throw Sir Kasimir, whom she hated, down the oubliette as he left the castle. Christina

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was horror-struck at the thought of such treachery, but bethought herself of a way of saving Sir Kasimir. When the christening was ended she asked the Knight to take the little babes, one in each arm, carry them down to the gate, and show them to his men as the heirs of Adlerstein. She knew that no one in the castle would dare to open the oubliette at the risk of killing their young Lords, and thus Sir Kasimir would get away in safety. Sir Kasimir was amazed at the request, but Christina was so urgent that he consented to her strange proposal, and thus escaped unharmed. Dame Kunigunda never forgave Christina for her stratagem, but it was not for years afterwards that Sir Kasimir learned how he had been saved from the oubliette.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EAGLETS.

YEARS passed on. Christina lived a dreary life in the castle under the harsh rule of her mother-in-law, who hated her, and lost no opportunity of abusing the "burgher woman," as she called Christina, often striking her when she displeased her. Christina never dared to visit Ulm, her only comfort was in her children, and in the kind letters and parcels of gifts that came occasionally from Master Gottfried and his wife. The gifts were very welcome, for the little household of Adlerstein lived in great poverty,

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and the twins, as they grew up, ran about barefooted and bareheaded, clad in blue cloth of Christina's own weaving and making. They were healthy, handsome little creatures, so exactly alike that no one but their mother could tell one from the other. They were tall and slender, with fair rosy complexions, and dark eyes and hair that told of their Italian blood.

They were never quarrelsome. Either from the influence of Christina's gentleness, or from their absolute union, they could do and enjoy nothing apart, and would as soon have thought of their right and left hands falling out as of Ebbo and Friedel disputing. Ebbo, however, was always the right hand. *The* Baron, as he had been called from the first, had, from the time he could sit at the table at all, been put into the baronial chair with the eagle carved at the back; every member of the household, from his grandmother downwards, placed him foremost, and Friedel followed their example. Sometimes, however, the mother doubted whether there would have been this perfect absence of all contest had Friedmund been the elder.

At first they were entirely left to her. Their grandmother heeded them little as long as they were healthy; but, as they grew older, she showed anxiety lest their mother should interfere with the fierce, lawless spirit proper to their birth. Frequent were the encounters between Christina and the grandmother on this point—the mother seeking to instil her own gentle principles into her sons' minds; the grandmother encouraging them, especially Ebbo, in every kind of lawlessness and cruelty. The

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boys had their own way in everything, or rather, the Baron had his way and his way was Friedel's. Poor, base and scanty as were their surroundings, everything was done to feed their arrogance, with only their mother's influence to counteract their education in pride and violence. Friedel's naturally gentle and sweet disposition took little harm from the old Baroness's evil counsels, but Christina, thinking of Ebbo's more impetuous and headstrong character, could not but regard the future of her sons with much foreboding, and many were her prayers that good might triumph over evil in the end.

The boys' love was entirely given to their mother. Moreover, she was their oracle. Quick-witted and active-minded, they loved the learning their grandmother despised, and never rested till they knew all their mother could teach them. Reading and writing were soon mastered, Latin they learned in order to read their mother's books themselves.

The soft dreamy eye became Friedel's characteristic, as fire and keenness distinguished Ebbo's glance. By the merest shade Friedel excelled with the book or tool, and Ebbo with the weapon. The artistic nature in them was too strong to be discouraged. The illustrations in Christina's book awoke their desire to imitate them. Her drawing materials and carving tools were soon seized upon, and even the old Baroness could not find fault with the "burgher occupations" which kept the two restless spirits quiet during the many hours when winter storms confined them to the castle. So the years passed by, and

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only the children's growth marked the length of Christina's residence in the castle.

There was no change in the monotonous life, save that the elder Baroness grew more feeble in her limbs and more irritable in temper. There were no events save a few hunting adventures of the boys, or the letters from Ulm. The same life continued, of shrinking in dread from the old lady's tyrannous dislike, and of constant endeavour to teach the boys better principles, without that open opposition for which Christina had neither power nor strength.

CHAPTER IX.

EBBO MAKES HIS CHOICE.

THE twins were about fourteen years old when an incident occurred which aroused all Christina's worst fears. She had never dared to tell her mother-in-law that the freedom from interference by the Swabian League which they had enjoyed so long was only purchased by the understanding that her sons should, when of age, carry out their father's intention of rendering homage to the Emperor. Sir Kasimir had promised that they should be unmolested so long as no raids on travellers were committed by the Adlersteiners, whose scanty numbers had hitherto prevented them from disputing with the Schlangenwalders the right of robbery at the Debateable Ford ; and Christina had trusted to her own influence with her retainers, and

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Sir Kasimir's influence at Court, to keep the peace until her boys should grow up.

But the peace of fourteen years was rudely broken.

She had, one afternoon in hay-time, been visiting a sick woman on the mountains. Darkness fell, and no one appeared to escort her home; she wondered what could have happened, and with growing uneasiness at length started for the castle. On the way she met one of her men, who told her in great excitement that, at the command of the old Baroness, the Adlersteiners had made a raid on some travellers crossing the stream, that much booty and two prisoners had been taken, and that the young Baron had behaved with great bravery, and won a horse for himself.

Christina was in dismay at this new beginning of free-booting in its worst form, overthrowing all her hopes. The best thing that could happen would be the immediate interference of the Swabian League, while her sons were too young to be personally held guilty. Yet this might involve ruin and confiscation; and, apart from all consequences, she bitterly grieved that the stain of robbery should have fallen on her hitherto innocent sons.

When she mounted the hall-steps, she found the floor strewn with bales of goods.

"Mother," cried Ebbo, flying up to her, "have you heard? I have a horse! a spirited bay, a knightly charger, and Friedel is to ride him by turns with me. Where is Friedel? And, mother, Heinz said I struck as good a stroke as any of them, and I have a sword for Friedel

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now. And, little mother, this is for you, a gown of velvet, a real black velvet. We always said that, the first prize we won, the little mother should wear velvet. Do but look at it."

"Woe is me, my Ebbo!" she sighed, bending to kiss his brow.

He understood her at once, coloured, and spoke hastily and in defiance. "It was in the river, mother, the horses fell; it is our right."

"Fairly, Ebbo?" she asked in a low voice.

"Nay, mother, if Jobst *did* hide a branch in mid-stream, it was no doing of mine; and the horses fell. The Schlangenwalders don't even wait to let them fall. We cannot live, if we are to be so nice and dainty."

"Ah! my son, I thought not to hear you call mercy and honesty mere niceness."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed Baroness Kunigunda, "Take the Baron's bounty, woman, and vex him not after his first knightly exploit."

"Heaven knows, and Ebbo knows," said the trembling Christina, "that, were it a knightly exploit, I were the first to exult."

"Thou! thou craftsman's girl! dost presume to call in question the knightly deeds of a noble house! There!" cried the furious Baroness, striking her face. "Now! dare to be insolent again." Her hand was uplifted for another blow, when it was grasped by Eberhard, who held her with youthful strength far exceeding hers. She had often struck his mother before, but not in his presence,

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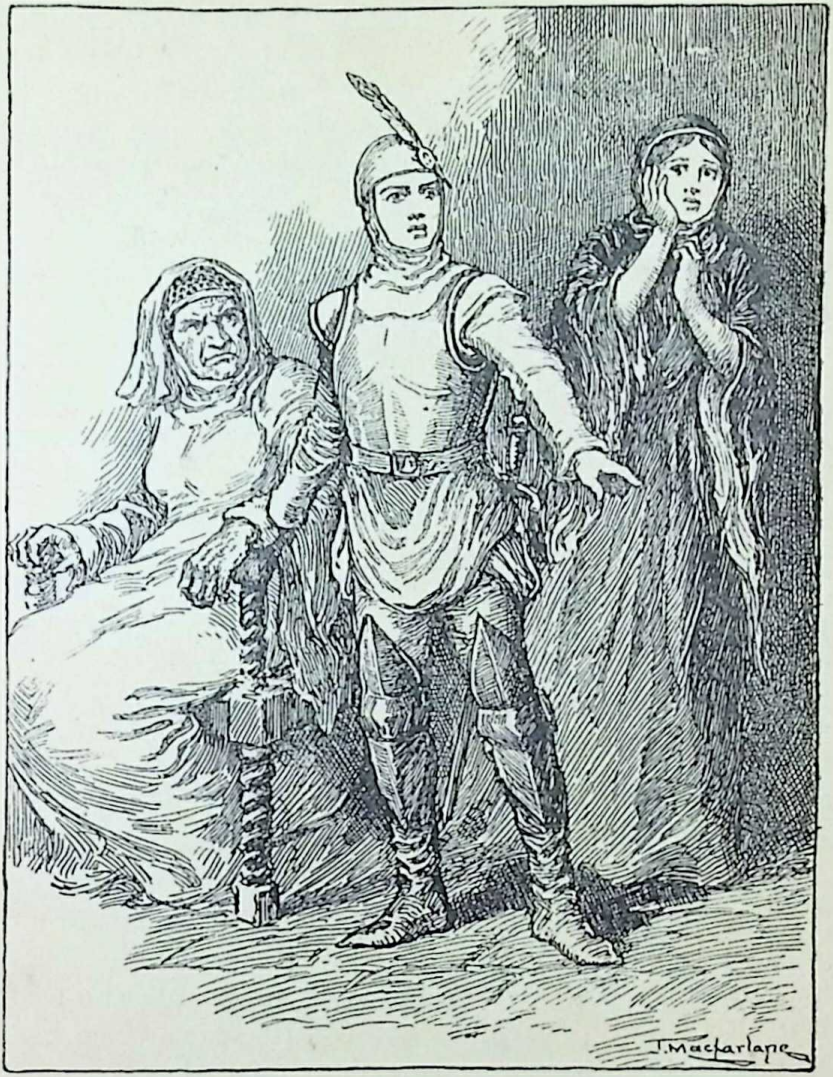

"And hear you all, she shall rule all, and never be trampled on more."

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and the greatness of the shock seemed to make him cool and absolutely dignified.

"Be still, grandame," he said, "No, mother, I am not hurting her," and indeed the surprise seemed to have taken away her rage, and unresistingly she allowed him to seat her in a chair. Still holding her arm, he made his clear boyish voice resound through the hall, saying, "Servants all, know that, as I am your lord and master, so is my honoured mother lady of the castle, and she is never to be gainsayed, let her say or do what she will."

"You are right, Lord Baron," said Heinz. "The Lady Christina is our gracious and beloved dame. Long live the Baroness Christina!" And the voices of almost all the serfs present mingled in the cry.

"And hear you all," continued Eberhard, "she shall rule all, and never be trampled on more. Grandame, you understand?"

The old woman seemed confounded, and cowered in her chair without speaking. Christina at that moment was struck with alarm by Ebbo's renewed inquiry for his brother.

"Friedel! Was not he with thee?"

"No; I never saw him! Oh, mother," and the boy flung his arms round her neck, and whispered in her ear, "Friedel said it would be a treacherous attack, and I called him a coward. Oh, mother, we never parted thus before! He went up the hill-side. Oh, where is he?"

They descended the steps together, calling the men. The clear blue sky was fast showing the stars, and into

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the evening stillness echoed the loud cries of the searchers. Ebbo tried to raise his voice, but broke down in the shout, and, choked with agitation, said, "Let me go, mother. None know his haunts as I do!"

"Hark!" she said, only grasping him tighter.

Thinner, shriller, clearer came a far-away cry from the heights, and Ebbo sent up a pealing mountain shout, responded to by another, which was plainly not an echo. "Towards the Red Eyrie," said Hans.

"He will have been to the Ptarmigan's Pool," said Ebbo, sending up his voice again; the answer conveyed, to these adepts in mountain language, that Friedel needed help.

"Depend upon it," said the startled Ebbo, "that he has got up amongst those rocks where the dead chamois rolled down last summer;" then, as Christina uttered a faint cry of terror, Heinz added, "Fear not, lady, those are not the calls of one who has met with a hurt. Baron Friedel has the sense to be patient rather than risk his bones if he cannot move safely in the dark."

"Up after him!" said Ebbo, uttering a variety of shouts promising speedy aid, and receiving a halloo in reply that reassured even his mother. Equipped with a rope and sundry torches of pinewood, Heinz and two of the serfs were speedily ready. Ebbo gave his arm to his mother, and Heinz held his torch so as to guide her up the winding path. Guided by the constant exchange of shouts, they reached a height where the wind blew cold and wild, and Ebbo pointed to an intensely black shadow

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overhung by a peak rising like the gable of a house into the sky. "Yonder lies the tarn," [1] he said. Steering their course round the rocks above the pool, the rescuers made their way towards the base of the peak, which was in fact the summit of the mountain, the top of the Eagle's Ladder, the highest step of which they had attained. The peak towered over them, and the castle lights beneath seemed as if it would be easy to let a stone fall straight down on them.

Friedel's cry seemed to come from under their feet. The Schneiderlein proceeded to lower a rope, which, when fastened round Friedel's waist, would enable him to climb safely up; and, after a breathless space, the torchlight shone upon the longed-for face, and Friedel, springing on the path, cried, "The mother!—and here!"

"Oh, Friedel, where have you been? What is this in your arms?"

He showed them a little white kid.

"Whence is it, Friedel?"

He pointed to the peak, saying, "I was lying on my back by the tarn, when my lady eagle came sailing overhead, so low that I could see this poor little thing, and hear it bleat."

"Thou hast been to the Eyrie—the inaccessible Eyrie!" exclaimed Ebbo, in amazement.

"It is not hard after the first," said Friedel. "I only waited to watch the old birds out again."

"Robbed the eagles! And the young ones?"

[1] Tarn: a small mountain lake.

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"Well," said Friedmund, as if half ashamed, "they were twin eaglets, and their mother had left them, and I felt as though I could not harm them; so I only bore off the kid, and stuck some feathers in my cap. But by that time the sun was down, and soon I could not see my footing; and, when I found that I had missed the path, I thought I had best nestle in the nook where I was, and wait for day."

"Ah, Friedel! didst do it to prove my words false?" interposed Ebbo, eagerly.

"What words?"

"Thou knowest. Make me not speak them again."

"Oh, those!" said Friedel, only now recalling them. "No, verily; they were but a moment's anger. I wanted to save the kid. I think it is old mother Rika's white kid. But oh, mother! I grieve to have thus frightened you."

Not a single word passed between them upon Ebbo's exploits. Whether Friedel had seen all from the heights, or whether he perceived that his brother preferred silence, he held his peace, only when they were near home, and the boys were walking in the darkness with arms round one another's necks, Christina heard Friedel say low and rather sadly, "I think I shall be a priest, Ebbo."

To which Ebbo only answered, "Nonsense!"

Christina understood that Friedel meant that robbery must be a severance between the brothers. Alas! had the moment come when their paths must diverge?

Christina prayed long that night, her heart full of dread of the consequence of the raid. Rumours of freebooting

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castles destroyed by the Swabian League sometimes reached her; and, if this outrage were once known, the forbearance that left Adlerstein unmolested must be over. She knew not what to ask, save that her sons might be shielded from evil, and might fulfil that promise of her dream, the star in heaven, the light on earth. When she rose from her knees, she stole softly into her sons' turret for a last look at them. Friedel, pale after the day's hunger and fatigue, slept in the most complete calm; but though Ebbo's eyes were closed, there was no repose in his face—his pose had none of the ease of sleep. She doubted whether he were not awake; but, knowing that he would not brook any endeavour to force confidence he did not offer, she murmured a prayer and blessing, and left them.

Ebbo was so disturbed by his mother's grief over the raid that he could not sleep. Very early he awoke Friedel, and creeping softly downstairs, they took the keys from under their grandmother's pillow while she slept, and set free the two prisoners, returning to them all the plunder. They were an Italian merchant and his servant; the merchant, Gian Battista by name, told the boys that he had been sold as a slave to the Turks, and in the galleys had known a German prisoner whose name was something like theirs. They did not take much notice at the time, but remembered the fact afterwards.

Returning to the castle from escorting the merchant on his way the young Barons found the castle in an uproar, and the old Baroness about to strike Christina, whom she

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accused of having freed the prisoners. Ebbo again interfered, and repeated his words of the day before, declaring to the assembled serfs and servants that they were to obey his mother in everything, and that he himself intended to be an honourable, Godfearing, law-abiding gentleman, and not a lawless robber-lord like his forefathers.

The old Baroness was so stunned by the unexpected turn of events that she made no opposition, but relapsed into sullen silence, and made no attempt to recover her authority. She fell ill that winter, but lingered for some time, and died a year or two after the raid.

When Christina was able to exert her authority in the castle she did what she could to put it into some kind of order, and introduced cleanly and decent ways of life into it. The little household was still very poor, but the household was orderly and respectable, and the twins grew up with a greater regard for their mother's teaching than would have been possible under their grandmother's rule, and Christina rejoiced to think that they had chosen the right way in life.

CHAPTER X.

THE EAGLETS IN THE CITY.

THE death of the old Baroness, which occurred when the twins were just sixteen, made a great difference in their lives. Christina sent a messenger to acquaint Master

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Gottfried with the news, asking him to communicate it to Sir Kasimir. The reply was a warm invitation to Christina and her sons to come immediately to visit her uncle and aunt. The Kaiser and his son Maximilian, the King of the Romans, were expected at Ulm ; it would be a most favourable opportunity for the two young Barons to pay homage to their Emperor, and receive from him the honour of knighthood. Sir Kasimir was to be in the Emperor's train, and looked forward to meeting his godsons and their mother, and to introducing them to the Court. Christina resolved to return at once to Ulm under the protection of the escort her uncle had sent.

The two boys regarded the coming visit with different feelings. Ebbo, hitherto the most impetuous and least thoughtful, viewed it with a seriousness that, but for his naturally sweet temper, would have been sullen. His ambitions had seemed greater than Friedel's, but the thought of yielding up his independence, even to his sovereign, was very bitter to a spirit that could not endure to receive favours from anyone. His boyish pride dreaded a meeting with these merchant kinsfolk of his mother's —"greasy burghers," as he called them to Friedel, and he feared that his poverty and his ignorance of the ways of the world would expose him to many mortifications at the hands of the wealthy citizens, or the frequenters of the Court.

Friedel, less proud and self-centred, looked forward with happy anticipation to what his fancy pictured as the home of all the beauty, sacred and romantic, that he had

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glimpsed at through his mother. Religion, poetry, art, learning, refinement, had all come to him through her, and he dreamt of the dim distant city as a land of enchantment. Christina was in raptures at the thought of seeing her dear uncle and aunt again, and of showing them her tall sons. Thus the little family set out on the journey with widely different hopes and feelings.

The visit was a great success. Master Gottfried and his wife were overjoyed to see their dear child once more, and gave her and her sons the warmest of welcomes. Friedel responded at once to their kindness, and Ebbo's pride was conquered by the fine dignity and benevolence of the old master-carver. In truth the young Baron was agreeably surprised by the appearance and manner of his kinsfolk, and was much impressed by the great respect and honour in which Master Gottfried was held by everyone. The luxury of the house, the tapestried walls, the polished furniture, the lamps and candles, the damask linen, the array of silver, pewter, and glass were a great contrast to the bare walls and scant necessaries of Castle Adlerstein ; it seemed to the brothers like a new world, in which they found themselves and their barren nobility at a disadvantage, compared with the young men of the Court and the many whom they met, through Sir Kasimir's good offices, at the tilt-yard, and at the various balls, dinners, and other festivities given by the good citizens of Ulm in their Emperor's honour.

Sir Kasimir had proved himself a good friend to his godsons. He had spoken of them to both the Emperor

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and his son Maximilian, had introduced them at Court, and obtained from the Emperor the favour of knighthood for both of them. Friedel liked the courtly and handsome Sir Kasimir, who seemed in every way so much the superior of the two inexperienced mountain lads. But Ebbo resented what he thought Sir Kasimir's patronage; moreover, he was quick-witted, and saw that Sir Kasimir, who was a widower, greatly admired Christina. The long quiet life in the mountain air had greatly benefitted the delicate town girl. She had grown into beauty, and, now dressed in the rich clothes her aunt delighted in bestowing on her, she was by far the fairest dame in Ulm.

The headstrong Ebbo could not bear the thought of his adored mother marrying again; the idea that Sir Kasimir might become his father in-law was abhorrent to him, and caused him even to extend his dislike of the knight to his little fair-haired daughter Thekla, then about five years old. Thekla took a great fancy to the young Barons and their lovely mother, but nothing would induce Ebbo to be friendly with the child or her father.

The twins were very kindly received by the townspeople of Ulm. Friedel, sunny and sweet-natured, made friends everywhere; Ebbo, though more reserved, found his visit much more agreeable than he had expected, while the homage to the Emperor which had been so hard a morsel for the proud young Baron to swallow was rendered unexpectedly easy by a chance meeting with Maximilian.

The King of the Romans was the most striking figure of his time. Handsome in person, brave to rashness, chival-

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rous and romantic, courteous to all, a lover of the arts, a born soldier and a wise ruler, his was a personality perfectly fitted to evoke the spirit of hero-worship in an ardent warm-hearted youth like Ebbo. Maximilian was especially gracious to the twins of Adlerstein, whom he met just after he had climbed the Cathedral spire—a feat that excited their warm admiration—and the young Barons immediately fell under his spell, and became his most devoted adherents. Ebbo at once decided to do homage to the Kaiser, and sign the Swabian League.

Christina's joy when she heard of Ebbo's decision was great, her heart was lifted up in thankfulness that her son had chosen the path of right and loyalty. Ebbo was conscious that this submission, while depriving him of little actual power, would bring him into touch with the civilized world and open to him fields of true honour. So the ceremonies were gone through, and the oath of allegiance taken, Ebbo and Friedel were knighted, and Christina was happier than she had ever dreamed of being, for her uncle and sons had come to know and love one another, and the first steps had been taken towards making the Adlerstein family the peaceful honourable nobles she had always longed to see them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EAGLETS AND THE SNAKE.

Before Christina and her sons returned to their home in Castle Adlerstein Ebbo's fears had been fulfilled; Sir

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Kasimir Wildschloss Adlerstein had made a formal proposal to Master Gottfried Sorel for the hand of his niece Christina. The proposal was received with much delight by Master Gottfried and Johanna, who felt that their dear niece was highly honoured, and urged her to accept the knight's offer. But Christina's heart was true to the wild young Baron who had married her in defiance of all his family traditions, and had spent his last breath in asserting her claims. With timidity indeed, but with firmness, she refused Sir Kasimir's proposal, saying that she could never marry again. Her uncle pressed her to reconsider the matter, pointing out how much it would be to her sons' advantage to have such a stepfather to guide their youth, and protect their interests. But Christina had no mind to put a stepfather over her boys, and continued steadfast in her refusal. The boys, when they heard of the proposed marriage, were furious, for they adored their mother and could not bear the thought of her preferring anyone else. They listened with indignation when their uncle pointed out to them the loneliness that would be Christina's lot when they themselves should marry, and declared they would never leave her. Master Gottfried, while deeply disappointed, could not help loving the boys for their devotion to their mother, and reluctantly informed Sir Kasimir that his niece could not be induced to listen to his suit.

Soon afterwards the little family returned to Castle Adlerstein. Good Master Sorel had settled upon his beloved niece a very handsome dowry, whereby Christina

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was enabled to make many needed improvements that rendered the castle more habitable than it had ever been. A chaplain was secured, a very learned man, who could assist the youths in their studies, the hall and other rooms fitted up, and the boys turned their endeavours to teaching the peasantry to sow and plant cornfields and vineyards. They found the task of reform a vexatious one. The serfs, accustomed to a hand-to-mouth existence, much preferred the old chances of spoil and warfare to steady labour in the fields, even with the rewards they were offered ; they did not understand these new notions, and against their sullen ignorance it was difficult to make headway.

Friedel was his brother's right-hand in these schemes, and his persuasions were of more effect than Ebbo's anger. Gradually some progress was made with the younger men, who could enter more readily into the young Baron's schemes. But before long came troubles more serious than contending with an obstinate peasantry.

The Count Schlangenwald had for long been absent in Styria. But in a petty quarrel he had lost his eldest son, and returned home more bitter and violent than ever. His followers were constantly worrying the Adlerstein borders, and scarce a day passed without some complaint from the serfs of their outrages. Christina tried to restrain her son's wrath, and induced Ebbo to write a letter to the Count, remonstrating on the conduct of his retainers. The answer came speedily, and thus it read :

" Know you, Baron Eberhard von Adlerstein, that

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your forefathers have injured me by thought, word, and deed. Your great-grandfather usurped my lands at the ford. Your grandfather stole my cattle and burnt my mills. Your father slew eight of my retainers and spoiled my crops. You yourself claim my land at the ford, and secure the spoil which is justly mine. Therefore do I declare war against you. Therefore to you and all yours, to your helpers and helpers' helpers, am I a foe. And thereby shall I have maintained my honour against you and yours.

WOLFGANG, Count von Schlangenwald.
HIEROM, Count von Schlangenwald—his cousin."
Etc. etc. etc.

A long list of names followed; and a large seal, bearing the snake of Schlangenwald, was appended thereto.

"The old wretch!" burst out Ebbo; "it is a feud letter."

"A feud letter!" exclaimed Friedel; "they are no longer according to the law."

"Law!—what cares he for law or mercy either? Is this the way men act by the League? Did we not swear to send no more feud letters, nor have recourse to force of arms?

"We must appeal to the Markgraf of Wurtem-burg," said Friedel.

It was the only measure in their power, though Ebbo winced at it; but his oaths were recent, and his conscience would not allow him to break them by doing justice himself. He must lay the whole matter before the Markgraf, who

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was the head of the Swabian League, and bound to redress his wrongs. He got little satisfaction. The Markgraf, who was secretly a friend of Schlangenwald, affected to laugh at the feud letter as out of date and harmless; he evidently regarded the petty outrages on Ebbo's peasantry as matters far too small for the attention of the League, and told Ebbo that he, being a Baron of the Empire, must keep his bounds respected. Ebbo returned home very gloomy, determined that Schlangenwald should suffer for it next time he made a raid on Adlerstein land. But Schlangenwald's depredations were always committed on the peasantry, and Ebbo could not revenge himself on Schlangenwald's serfs, who were defenceless, and more miserably poor than his own. His followers could not understand his forbearance, and once, when he set free a wretched serf whom they had caught, they ventured to voice their discontent with the new order of things. It was a difficult position for the young Baron, and even his mother's approbation did not greatly comfort him.

Christina perceived that this was one of his most critical periods of life, baited as he was by the enemy of his race, and feeling all the disadvantages which heart and conscience gave him in dealing with a man who had neither. The necessity of arming his retainers, and having fighting men as a guard, were additional temptations to his inherited habits of violence; and that so proud and fiery a nature as his should never become involved in them was almost beyond hope. Even present danger seemed more around than ever before. The estate was almost in a state of

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siege, and Christina never saw her sons quit the castle without thinking of their father's fate, and passing into the chapel to entreat for their return unharmed in body or soul. The snow, which she had so often hailed as a friend, was never more welcome than this winter; not merely as shutting the enemy out, and her sons in, but as cutting off all danger of further Schlangenwald depredations.

CHAPTER XII.

WORK FOR THE EAGLETS.

THE snow had melted when, one spring afternoon, news was brought to Adlerstein that the Schlangerwalders were lying in ambush at the Adlerstein landing-place, ready to fall upon some travellers who were crossing the stream. In haste Ebbo summoned his followers, then, with Friedel, set out at their head to the rescue of the travellers. In great trembling Christina saw her sons go, not daring to say a word to restrain them, for this was a righteous cause. From the castle she watched the encounter, the struggle, the victory of her sons' party, the rescue of the travellers and the flight of the Schlangenwalders. Then with a thankful heart she went to make preparations for the return of the band.

A quarter of an hour later, a gay step mounted the ascent, and Friedel's bright face laughed from his helmet: "There, mother, will you crown your knights? Could you see Ebbo bear down the chief squire? for the old

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Snake was not there himself. And whom do you think we rescued, besides a whole band of Venetian traders? Why, my uncle's friend, the architect, of whom he used to speak—Master Moritz Schleiermacher."

"Moritz Schleiermacher! I knew him as a boy. Poor Master Moritz! Is he much hurt?"

"No, mother, he is but giddied and stunned, and now must you send down store of meat, wine and beer; for the wains cannot all cross till daylight, and we must keep ward all night lest the Schlangenwalders should fall on them again. Plenty of good cheer, mother, to make a right merry watch."

"Take heed, Friedel mine; a merry watch is scarce a safe one."

"Even so, sweet little mother, and therefore must Ebbo and I share it." So away went the light-hearted boy, and by and by Christina saw the red watch-fire as she gazed from her turret window. No disturbance took place, and at sunrise a hasty meal was partaken of, and the work of crossing the river was set in hand.

"Pity," said Moritz, the architect, "that this ford were not spanned by a bridge, to the avoiding of danger and spoil."

"Who could build such a bridge?" asked Ebbo.

"Yourself, Lord Baron, in union with us burghers of Ulm. It were well worth your while to give land and stone, and ours to give labour and skill, provided we fixed a toll on the passage, which would be willingly paid to save peril and delay."

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The brothers caught at the idea, and the merchants agreed that such a bridge would be a priceless boon to all traders between Constance, Ulm, and Augsburg, and would attract many travellers who were scared away by the evil fame of the Debateable Ford. Master Moritz looked at the stone of the mountain, pronounced it excellent material, and already sketched the span of the arches with a view to winter torrents. As to the site, the best was on the firm ground above the ford ; but here only one side was Adlerstein, and Schlangenwald's consent must be obtained to the plan.

After this survey, the travellers took leave of the barons, promising to write when their fellow-citizens should have been sounded as to the bridge ; and Ebbo remained in high spirits. " Peace instead of war at home," he said ; " with the revenue it will bring I will build a mill, and set our lads to work, so that they may become less dull and stupid than their parents. Then will we follow the Emperor with a train that none need despise ! No one will talk now of Adlerstein not being able to take care of himself ! "

In due course letters came from Ulm, saying that the guilds of mercers and wine merchants were delighted with the project, and invited the Baron of Adlerstein to a council in the city. There Ebbo found that his late exploit and his future plan had made him a person of much greater consideration than on his last visit, and he behaved with far more ease and affability in consequence.

The two guilds agreed to build the bridge, and share

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the toll with the Baron in return for the ground and materials; they proposed to write to the Count of Schlangenwald an offer to include him in the scheme, awarding him a share of the profits in proportion to his contribution. The letter was despatched and a day appointed for hearing the answer.

The Count did not condescend to write, but returned through the city heralds an insulting refusal of their proposals, and a threat to the Baron of Adlerstein "not to meddle with a pebble of the river lest he should rue it." The message also contained a warning to the citizens of Ulm not to take up with Ebbo until they knew whether he had any rights at all in the Adlerstein land, as his father's death had never been proved.

"His right is plain. It is mere bravado, and an endeavour to make mischief between the Baron and the city," said Master Gottfried, while his nephews started with amaze. "His father's death was proved by an eye-witness, whom you still have in your train, have you not, Lord Baron?"

"Yea," replied Ebbo, "he is at Adlerstein now, Heinrich Bauermann, called the Schneiderlein, a trooper, who alone escaped the slaughter, and from whom we have often heard how my father died."

"Was the corpse restored?" asked a councillor.

"No," said Ebbo. "Almost all our retainers had perished, and when a friar was sent to the hostel to bring home the remains, it appeared that the treacherous foe had borne them off."

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The whole assembly agreed that the Count could only mean to make the absence of direct evidence about a murder committed eighteen years ago tell in sowing distrust between the allies. The suggestion was not worth a thought, and it was plain that no site would be available except the Debateable Strand. After some discussion it was decided to begin building the bridge at once, in spite of Schlangenwald.

The two young Barons rode home very silently. The doubt cast on their father's death had disturbed them greatly. Friedel recalled to Ebbo the tale which the Italian merchant had told them of the German who was a fellow-slave with him at the galleys, wondering if it were possible that their father had really lived after all, and been betrayed by Schlangenwald to a fate worse than death. They agreed not to distress their mother by telling her of Schlangenwald's mysterious message, but the thought that their father might be alive haunted them. Friedel especially dwelt on it, and secretly determined that, at the first opportunity, he would make further inquiries into his father's death. He again questioned Heinz most closely with regard to it, but got no further satisfaction than a positive assurance that his master was certainly dead when he himself escaped. With this assurance Friedel was forced to be content, but the doubt once raised would not be laid again.

Meanwhile Ebbo plunged eagerly into the plans for building the bridge, and Master Moritz was a constant guest at the castle. So the summer passed.

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CHAPTER XIII.

FRIEDMUND'S RESOLVE.

THE stone was quarried high on the mountain, and a direct road was made for bringing it down to the waterside. The blocks of stone were brought down, and wooden sheds were erected for the workmen in the meadow.

In August, however, came tidings that the Kaiser Frederick III. had died. His death was not likely to make much change in the government, which had of late been left to his son. At this time the King of the Romans was at Innspruck collecting troops for the deliverance of Styria and Carinthia from the invading Turks. The Markgraf of Wurtemburg sent a message to all the Swabian League that the new sovereign would be best pleased if their homage were paid to him in his camp at the head of their armed retainers.

Here was the way of enterprise and honour open at last, and the young Barons of Adlerstein eagerly prepared for it. The last busy day was over, and in the summer evening the brothers were coming down from the tarn in the mountains.

"I know not why," said Friedel, "but it is to me as if I were taking my leave of all these purple hollows and heaven-lighted peaks cleaving the sky. All the more, Ebbo, since I have made up my mind to a resolution. I am convinced that it is my duty to strive to make sure of

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my father's fate. Hold, I say not that it is thine. Thou hast thy charge here——"

"Looking for a dead man," growled Ebbo; "a proper quest!"

"Not so," returned Friedel. "At the camp it will surely be possible to learn, through either Schlangenwald or his men, how it went with my father. Men say that his surviving son is of very different mould. He might bring something to light. Were he proved to be dead, then would our conscience be at rest; but, if he were in Schlangenwald's dungeon——"

"Folly! Impossible!"

"Yet men have pined eighteen years in dark vaults," said Friedel.

"If the serpent hath dared," cried Ebbo, "though it is mere folly to think of it, we would summon the League and have his castle about his ears! Not that I believe it."

"Scarce do I," said Friedel; "but there haunts me evermore the description of the kindly German chained between the decks of the Corsair's galley. Once and again have I dreamt thereof. If it should have been our father! Could I no otherwise ransom him, I would ply the oar in his stead."

"A fine exchange for my mother and me," gloomily laughed Ebbo, "to lose thee, my better self, for a rude, savage lord, who would straightway undo all our work, and scold and ill-treat our sweet mother for being more civilized than himself."

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"Shame, Ebbo!" cried Friedel, "or art thou but in jest?"

"So far in jest that thou wilt never go," returned Ebbo, drawing him closer. "Thou wilt learn—as I also trust to do—in what nameless hole the Snake hid his remains. Then shall they be buried with all proper ceremony. All the monks in the cloisters for twenty miles round shall sing requiems,[1] and thou and I will walk bareheaded, with candles in our hands, by the bier, till we rest him in the Blessed Friedmund's chapel; and there Lucas Handlein shall carve his tomb, and thou shalt sit for the likeness."

"So may it end," said Friedel, "but either I will know him dead, or endeavour somewhat in his behalf."

The conversation was interrupted by a half-clad peasant boy, who breathlessly informed them that all the Schlangenwald retainers had been mustered together, and ere day-break they were to fall upon the bridge, destroy it completely, and hang every workman they caught. He was himself a serf of Schlangenwald, but Christina had fed his family in the winter, and his mother had sent him secretly to warn the young Barons of the intended attack.

Ebbo thrust his hand into his pouch, and threw the boy a handful of coins, while Friedel gave him warm thanks, ere both brothers sprang with headlong speed down the wild path, to take advantage of the timely news.

The little council of war, consisting of the barons, their mother, Master Moritz, Heinz, and Hatto was speedily summoned. To bring up to the castle the workmen, their

[1] Requiems: hymns for the dead.

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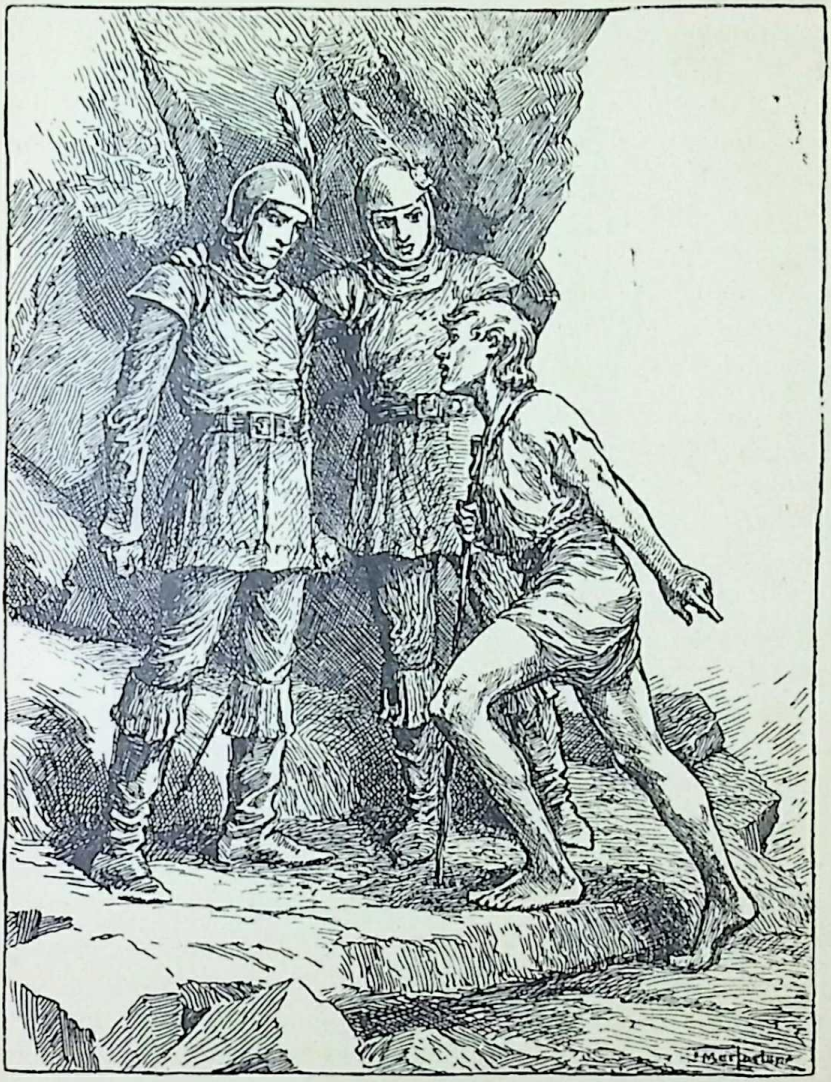

The conversation was interrupted by a half-clad peasant boy.

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families, and the more valuable implements, was at once decided; and Christina asked whether there would be anything left worth defending. Besides, it was scarcely lawful to enter on a private war when the imperial banner was in the field.

"Craving your pardon, gracious lady," said the architect, "that blame rests with him who provokes the war. See, Lord Baron, there is time to send to Ulm, where the two guilds, our allies, will at once equip their trained bands and despatch them. We meanwhile will hold the knaves in check, and, by the time our burghers come up, the snake brood will have had such a lesson as they will not soon forget. Said I well, Lord Baron?"

"Right bravely," said Ebbo. "It befits not our honour or rights, with my pledges to Ulm, or the fame of my house, to shut ourselves up and see the rogues work their will. My own score of men, besides the stouter masons, carpenters, and serfs, will be fully enough to make the old serpent of the wood rue the day, even without the aid of the burghers. Not a word against it, dearest mother. None is so wise as thou in matters of peace, but honour is here concerned. Did I not defend the work I have begun, I should be branded as a weak fool. Nor will I see the foes of my house insult me without striking a fair stroke. Hap what may, the Debateable Ford shall be debated! Call in the serfs, Hatto, and arm them. Master Moritz, let us summon thy masons and carpenters, and see who is a good man with his hands among them."

Christina saw that remonstrance was vain. The days

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of peril and violence were coming back again; and all she could take comfort in was, that, if not wholly right, her son was far from wholly wrong, and that with a free heart she could pray for a blessing on him and on his arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD.

By the early September sunrise the thicket beneath the pass was sheltering the twenty well-appointed soldiers of Adlerstein, each standing, holding his horse by the bridle, ready to mount at the instant. In their rear were the serfs and artisans. In advance were Master Moritz and the two Barons, the former in a stout plain steel helmet, cuirass, and gauntlets, a sword, and those new-fashioned weapons, pistols; the latter in full knightly armour, exactly alike, from the gilt-spurred heel to the eagle-crested helm, and often moving restlessly forward to watch for the enemy, though taking care not to be betrayed by the glitter of their mail. So long did they wait that there was even a doubt whether it might not have been a false alarm; and it was proposed to despatch a spy to see whether anything were doing at Schlangenwald

At length a rustling and rushing were heard; then a clank of armour. Ebbo vaulted into the saddle, and gave the word to mount. "Keep back your men, Lord Baron," said Schleiermacher. "Let his design be manifest. We

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must not be said to have fallen on him on his way to the muster."

"It would be but as he served my father!" muttered Ebbo, as the tramp of horses shook the ground, and bright armour became visible on the further side of the stream.

For the first time the brothers beheld the foe of their line. He was seated on a clumsy black horse, and sheathed in full armour, and was apparently a large heavy man, of powerful proportions. The snake on his crest and shield made him known to the twins. As the armed troop, outnumbering the Adlersteiners by about a dozen, and followed by a rabble with straw and pine brands, came forth on the meadow, the count halted and appeared to be giving orders.

Ebbo waited while Schlangenwald rode towards the old channel of the Braunwasser, and there he could hear him shout: "The lazy dogs are not astir yet. We will give them a réveille. Forward with your brands!"

"Now!" and Ebbo's cream-coloured horse leapt forth, as the whole band flashed into the sunshine from the greenwood covert.

"Who troubles the workmen on my land?" shouted Ebbo.

"Who you may be I care not," replied the count, "but when I find strangers unlicensed on my lands, I burn down their huts. On, fellows!"

"Back, fellows!" called Ebbo. "Whoso touches a stick on Adlerstein ground shall suffer."

"So!" said the count, "this is the burgher-bred,

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burgher-fed varlet, that calls himself of Adlerstein! Boy, thou had best be warned. Craven as thou art, not even with spirit to accept my feud, I would fain not have the trouble of sweeping thee from my path."

"Sir Count, as true Baron and belted knight, I defy thee! I proclaim my right to this ground, and whoso damages those I place there must do battle with me."

"Thou wilt have it then," said the count, taking his heavy lance from his squire, closing his visor, and wheeling back his horse, so as to give space for his career.

Ebbo did the like, while Friedel on one side, and Hierom von Schlangenwald on the other, kept their men in array, awaiting the issue of the strife between their leaders.

They closed in full shock, with shivered lances and rearing horses, but without damage to either. Each drew his sword, and they were pressing together, when Heinz, seeing a Schlangenwalder aiming with his cross-bow, rode at him furiously, and the *mêlee* became general; shots were fired, and in the throng Friedel lost sight of the main combat between his brother and the count.

Suddenly, however, there was a crash, as of falling men and horses, and both sides became aware that their leaders had fallen. Each party rushed to its fallen head. Friedel beheld Ebbo under his struggling horse, and an enemy dashing at his throat, and, flying to the rescue, he rode down the assailant. Their leaders down, the enemy had no one to rally them, and, in spite of their superiority in number, gave way in confusion before the furious onset of Adlerstein. Friedel rushed back to his brother.

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Ebbo lay prostrate under his horse; the count lay near him, apparently badly hurt.

"Ebbo! Ebbo mine, look up!" cried Friedel, leaping from his horse, and unclasping his brother's helmet.

"Friedel!" groaned a half-suffocated voice. "O take away the horse."

The dying steed was disengaged from the rider, who could not restrain his moans, though Friedel endeavoured to move him as gently as possible. It was then seen that the deep gash from the count's sword in the chest was not the most serious injury, but that an arquebus ball had pierced his thigh, before burying itself in the body of his horse; and that the limb had been crushed by the animal's struggles. He was nearly unconscious, and gasped with anguish, but, after Moritz had bathed his face and moistened his lips, as he lay in his brother's arms, he looked up with clearer eyes, and said: "Have I slain him? It was the shot, not he, that sent me down. Lives he? See—thou, Friedel—thou. Make him yield."

Friedel obeyed, and stepped towards the fallen foe. The wrongs of Adlerstein were indeed avenged, for the blood was welling fast from a deep thrust above the collar-bone, and the failing, feeble hand was wandering uncertainly among the clasps of the gorget.

"Let me aid," said Friedel, kneeling down, and in his pity for the dying man omitting the summons to yield, he threw back the helmet, and beheld a grizzled head and and stern hard features, darkened by a scowl of malignant hate. "Thou again,—thou whelp! I thought at least

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I had made an end of thee," he muttered, unheard by Friedel, who, intent on the thought that had recurred to him with greater vividness than ever, was again filling Ebbo's helmet with water. He refreshed the dying man's face with it, held it to his lips, and said; "Sir Count, variance and strife are ended now. For heaven's sake, say where I may find my father!"

"So! Wouldst find him?" replied Schlangenwald, fixing his look on the eager countenance of the youth, while his hand, with a dying man's nervous agitation, was fumbling at his belt.

"I would bless you for ever, could I but free him."

"Know then," said the count, speaking very slowly, and still holding the young knight's gaze with a sort of intent fascination, by the stony glare of his light gray eyes, "know that thy villain father is a Turkish slave, unless he be—as I hope—where his mongrel son may find him."

Therewith came a flash, a report; Friedel leaped back, staggered, fell; Ebbo started up, with horrified eyes, and a loud shriek, calling on his brother; Moritz sprang to his feet, shouting, "Shame! treason!"

"I call you to witness that I had not yielded," said the count. "There's an end of the brood!" and with a grim smile fell back a dead man, ere the indignant Adlersteiners fell on him in savage vengeance.

All this had passed like a flash of lightning; Friedel flung himself by his brother, and raising himself on one hand, with the other clasped Ebbo's, saying, "Fear not; it is nothing," and he was bending to take Ebbo's head

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again on his knee, when a gush of dark blood, from his left side, caused Moritz to exclaim, "Ah! Sir Friedel, the traitor did his work! That is no slight hurt."

"Where? How? The ruffian!" cried Ebbo, supporting himself on his elbow, so as to see his brother, who rather dreamily put his hand to his side, and, looking at the fresh blood that immediately dyed it, said, "I do not feel it This is more numb dulness than pain."

"A bad sign that," said Moritz, apart to one of the men, with whom he held counsel how to carry the wounded knights back to the castle.

By this time Heinz was riding back from the pursuit, and his triumph changed to rage and despair when he saw the condition of his young lords. Master Moritz proposed to lay them on some of the planks prepared for the building, and carry them up the new road.

"Methinks," said Friedel, "that I could ride if I were lifted on horseback, and thus would our mother be less shocked."

"Well thought," said Ebbo. "Go on and cheer her. Show her thou canst keep the saddle, however it may be with me," he added, with a groan of anguish.

Ebbo was lifted on the shoulders of his bearers, and Friedel strove to rise, with the aid of Heinz, but sank back, unable to use his limbs; and Schleiermacher was the more concerned. "It goes so with the backbone," he said. "Sir Friedmund, you had best be carried."

"Nay, for my mother's sake! And I would fain be on my good steed's back once again!" he entreated. And

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with much difficulty he was lifted to the back of his horse. Long, however, before the castle was reached, dizzy confusion and leaden helplessness so grew on him that it was with much ado that Heinz could keep him in his saddle; but, when he saw his mother in the castle gateway, he again collected himself, bade Heinz withdraw his supporting arm, and waved a greeting to her, as he called cheerily: "Victory, dear mother. Ebbo has overthrown the count, and you must not be grieved if it be at some cost of blood."

"Alas, my son!" was all Christina could say, for his effort at gaiety formed a ghastly contrast with the gray, livid hue that overspread his fair young face.

"Nay, little mother," he added, as she came so near that he could put his arm round her neck, "sorrow not, for Ebbo will need thee much. And, mother," as his face lighted up, "there is joy coming to you. Mother, he died not under the Schlangenwald swords."

"Who? Not Ebbo?" cried the bewildered mother.

"Your own Eberhard, our father," said Friedel, adding, as he met a startled look, "The cruel count owned it with his last breath. He is a Turkish slave, and surely heaven will give him back to comfort you. O mother, I had so longed to free him, but God be thanked that at least certainty was bought by my life." The last words were uttered almost unconsciously, but, as they were lifting him down, he bent once more and kissed the glossy neck of his horse. "Ah! poor fellow, thou too wilt be lonely. May Ebbo yet ride thee!"

The mother had no time for grief. Alas! She might

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have full time for that by and by! The one wish of the twins was to be together, and presently both were laid on the great bed in the upper chamber, Ebbo in a swoon from the pain of the transport, and Friedel lying so as to meet the first look of recovery. And, after Ebbo's eyes had re-opened, they watched one another in silence for a short space, till Ebbo said: "Is that the hue of death on thy face, brother?"

"I well believe so," said Friedel.

"Ever together," said Ebbo, holding his hand. "But alas! My mother! Would I had never sent thee to the traitor."

"Ah! So comes her comfort," said Friedel. "He owned that my father was among the Turks."

"And I," cried Ebbo. "I have withheld thee! O Friedel, had I listened to thee, thou hadst not been in this fatal broil!"

"Nay, ever together," repeated Friedel. "My mother will be able to ransom him. I know she will, so oft have I dreamt of his return. Then, mother, you will give him our dutiful greetings;" and he smiled again.

It was plain that the injuries, except Ebbo's sword-cut, were far beyond Christina's skill, and she could only endeavour to check the bleeding till better aid could be obtained from Ulm, whither Moritz had sent. There was an impression in the household that the two lives must end in the same hour, even as they had begun. Indeed, Ebbo was suffering so terribly, and was so much spent with pain and loss of blood, that he seemed sinking much

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faster than Friedel, whose wound bled less freely, and who only seemed benumbed and torpid.

Help was nearer than had been hoped, and before the sun was low on that long and grievous day, a doctor from Ulm was led into the upper chamber, where the mother looked up to him with a kind of hopeless gratitude on her face, which was nearly as white as those of her sons. The doctor soon saw that Friedel was past human aid ; but, when he declared that there was fair hope for the other youth, Friedel, who seemed to be roused by the examination, looked up with his beaming smile, saying, " There, little mother."

The doctor declared that he could not deal with the Baron's wound unless he were the sole occupant of the bed, and this sentence brought the first cloud of grief or dread to Friedel's brow, but only for a moment. He looked at his brother, who had again fainted at the first touch of his wounded limb, and said, " It is well. Tell the dear Ebbo that I cannot help it if after all I go to the praying, and leave him the fighting. Dear, dear Ebbo ! One day together again and for ever ! I leave thee for thine own sake." With much effort he signed the cross again on his brother's brow, and kissed it long and fervently. Then he struggled up on his elbow, saying, " Take me now, Heinz, ere Ebbo revive to be grieved. The last sacrifice," he further whispered, whilst almost giving himself to Heinz and Moritz to be carried to his own bed in the turret chamber.

There, even as they laid him down, began what seemed

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to be the mortal agony, and, though he was scarcely sensible, his mother felt that her first duty was to him, while his brother was in other hands. Perhaps it was well for her. Surgical practice was rough, and wounds made by fire-arms were thought to have taken in a poison that made treatment be supposed effective in proportion to the pain inflicted. When Ebbo was recalled by the torture to see no white reflection of his own face on the pillow beside him, and to feel in vain for the grasp of the cold damp hand, a delirious frenzy seized him, and his struggles were frustrating the doctor's attempts, when a low soft sweet song stole through the open door.

"Friedel!" he murmured, and held his breath to listen. All through the declining day did the gentle sound continue, never failing in the tender sweetness that had distinguished Friedel through life. And, whenever that voice was heard, let them do to him what they would, Ebbo was lulled almost out of sense of suffering by that swan-like music. Probably Friedel knew not, with any earthly sense, what he was doing, but to the very last he was serving his twin brother as none other could have aided him in his need.

The September sun had set, twilight was coming on, the doctor had worked his stern will, and Ebbo, quivering in every fibre, lay spent on his pillow, when his mother glided in. He raised his eyelids, and said, "He is not singing now."

"Singing indeed, but where we cannot hear him," she answered. "'Whiter than the snow, clearer than the

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ice-cave, more solemn than the choir. They will come at last.' That was what he said, even as he entered there." And the dove-like tone and tender calm face continued upon Ebbo the spell that the chant had left. He dozed as though still lulled by its echo.

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD IRON AND NEW STEEL.

Ebbo was long in recovering. At first he had no desire to live, and indeed believed that he could not live without Friedel, but gradually he came to wish to live for his mother's sake. To comfort him for his brother's loss Christina suggested that when Ebbo had recovered, they should build a church near the Debateable Ford, and consecrate it to St. Friedmund in memory of their beloved Friedel. The thought of this roused Ebbo from his sorrow, and he was further consoled by a visit which Maximilian paid to him. The new Kaiser liked the idea of the proposed church, and suggested that Ebbo and Dankwart Schlangenwald (who was a very different sort of man from the old Count) should swear friendship together, and join in building both the church and the bridge at the Ford. To this proposal Ebbo and Christina consented.

During Maximilian's visit, Dankwart Schlangenwald and Sir Kasimir were invited to Adlerstein, and the old enemies took a sacred oath to end the long feud between the families of Adlerstein and Schlangenwald, and hence-

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forth live at peace. Sir Kasimir was then setting out on a perilous mission to the East, and he begged Ebbo to marry his little daughter Thekla, so that he might leave her under Christina's care, and that Ebbo might have the right to protect her lands. Ebbo was at first unwilling to consent to Sir Kasimir's wish, though such child marriages were common, but finally agreed to it, and the wedding took place during Maximilian's stay at Adlerstein. Ebbo confided to the Kaiser the news that his father was living, and of his intention to seek him among the Turks, and bring him home, as Friedel had meant to do had he lived. The Kaiser approved of the plan, but forbade Ebbo to set out on his quest until his wounds were quite healed, and he was restored to health again. Meanwhile Ebbo occupied himself with the building of the church.

The clear sunshine of early summer was becoming low on the hill-sides, the clear amber-coloured stream of the Braunwasser rippled along its stony bed, winding in and out among the rocks so humbly that it seemed to be mocked by the wide span of the arch that crossed it.

Some way above, a clearing of the wood below the mountain showed huts, and labourers apparently constructing a mill ; and, on the left bank, an enclosure was traced out, within which were rising the walls of a small church.

Across the bridge came a pilgrim, stumbling along as if both halting and footsore, and bending as one bowed down by past toil and present fatigue. Pausing in the

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centre, he gazed round with a strange bewildered air—at the castle on the terraced hill-side, at the banner hanging so lazily that the device was hidden in the folds; then at the crags, rising in broad step above step up to the Red Eyrie, bathed in sunset majesty of dark crimson. The pilgrim's eye lighted up at the sight; then, looking down at bridge, and church, and trodden wheel-tracked path, he frowned with perplexity, and each painful step grew heavier and more uncertain.

Near the opposite side of the enclosure there waited an elderly man with two horses—one an aged white mare, the other a little mountain pony, with a pad-saddle. And close to the bank of the stream might be seen the pony's owner, a little girl of some seven years, whose tight round lace cap had slipped back, as well as her blue silk hood, and exposed a profusion of loose flaxen hair, and a plump, innocent face, intent upon some private little bit of building of her own.

The pilgrim looked at her, and for a moment was about to address her; but, with a look of repulsion, dragged himself on to the porch of the rising church, where he could see into the interior. All was unfinished, save a chantry-chapel opposite to the porch, containing what were evidently designed to be two monuments. One showed the outline of a warrior, bearing a shield on which a coiled serpent was rudely sketched in red chalk. The other, in a much more forward state, was actually under the hands of the sculptor, and represented a slender youth, almost a boy, though in the full armour of a knight, his hands

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clasped on his breast over a lute, an eagle on his shield, an eagle-crest on his helmet, and, under the arcade supporting the altar-tomb, shields alternately of eagles and doves.

But the strangest thing was that this young knight seemed to be sitting for his own effigy. The very same face, under the very same helmet, only with the warm hues of life, instead of in cold white marble, was to be seen on the shoulders of a young man, whose raised visor showed keen, finely-cut features, and a pair of dark brown eyes, of somewhat grave and sad expression.

"Have a care, Lucas," he presently said; "I fear me you are chiselling away too much. It must be a softer, more rounded face than mine has become; and, above all, let it not catch any saddened look. Keep that air of solemn waiting in glad hope, as though he saw the dawn through his closed eyelids, and were about to take up his song again!"

"Verily, Lord Baron, now the likeness is so far forward, the actual sight of you may lead me to mar it rather than mend."

"So is it well that this should be the last sitting. I am to set forth for Genoa in another week, for my lameness is gone."

Just then the little girl, all flushed and dabbled, flew rushing up from the stream, but came to a sudden standstill at sight of the stranger, who addressed her. "Little lady," he said, "is this the Debateable Ford?"

"No; now it is the Friendly Bridge," said the child.

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The pilgrim started, as with a pang of recollection. "And what is yonder castle?" he further asked.

"Castle Adlerstein," she said proudly.

"And you are the little lady of Adlerstein Wildschloss?"

"Yes," again she answered; and then, gathering courage —"You are a holy pilgrim! Come up to the castle for supper and rest." And then, springing past him, she flew up to the knight, crying, "Lord Baron, here is a holy pilgrim, weary and hungry. Let us take him home to the mother."

"Did he take thee for a wild elf?" said the young man, with an elder-brotherly endeavour to right the little cap that had slidden under the chin, and to push back the unmanageable wealth of hair under it, ere he rose and came forward and spoke with kind courtesy, as he observed the wanderer's worn air and feeble step. "Dost need a night's lodging, holy pilgrim? My mother will make thee welcome, if thou canst climb as high as the castle yonder."

The pilgrim made a bow, but, instead of answering, demanded hastily, "See I yonder the bearing of Schlangenwald?"

"Even so. Castle Schlangenwald is about a league further on, and thou wilt find a kind reception there, if thither thou art bent."

"Is that Count Wolfgang's tomb?" still eagerly pursued the pilgrim; and receiving a sign in the affirmative, "What was his end?"

"He fell in a skirmish."

"By whose hand?"

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"By mine."

"Ha!" and the pilgrim surveyed him with undisguised astonishment; then, without another word, took up his staff and limped out of the building, but not on the road to Schlangenwald. Shortly afterwards he was overtaken by the young knight and the little lady on their horses, just where the new road to the castle parted from the old way by the Eagle's Ladder. The knight reined up as he saw the poor man's slow, painful steps, and said, "So thou art not bound for Schlangenwald?"

"I would to the village, so please you—to the shrine of the Blessed Friedmund."

"Nay, at this rate thou wilt not be there till midnight," said the young knight, springing off his horse. "See, Thekla, do thou ride on with Heinz to tell the mother I am bringing her a holy pilgrim to tend. And thou, good man, mount my old mare. Fear not; she is steady and sure-footed, and hath of late been used to a lame rider."

The pilgrim uttered a murmur of acknowledgment as he seated himself on horseback. "But what is this?" he exclaimed, almost with dismay. "A road to the castle up here!"

"Yes, we find it a great convenience. Thou art surely from these parts?" added the knight.

"I was a man-at-arms in the service of the Baron," was the answer, in an odd, muffled tone.

"What!—of my grandfather!" was the exclamation.

"No!" gruffly. "Of old Baron Eberhard. Not of any of the Wildschloss crew."

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"But I am not a Wildschloss! I am grandson to Baron Eberhard! Oh, wast thou with him and my father when they were set upon in the inn?" he cried, looking eagerly up to the pilgrim; but the man kept his broad-leaved hat slouched over his face, and only muttered, "The son of Christina!" the last word so low that Ebbo was not sure that he caught it, and the next moment the old warrior exclaimed exultingly, "And you have had vengeance on them! When—how—where?"

"Last harvest-tide—at the Debateable Strand," said Ebbo, never able to speak of the encounter without a weight at his heart. "It was a meeting in full career—lances broken, sword-stroke on either hand. I was sore wounded, but my sword went through his collar-bone."

"Well struck! good stroke!" cried the pilgrim, in rapture. "And with that sword?"

"With this sword. Didst know it?" said Ebbo, drawing the weapon, and giving it to the old man, who held it for a few moments, weighed it affectionately, and with a long low sigh restored it, saying, "It is well. You and that blade have paid off the score. I should be content. Let me dismount. I know my way to the hermitage."

"Nay, what is this?" said Ebbo; "thou must have rest and food. My mother will not be denied the care of thee."

"Best let me go, ere I bring evil on you all. I can pray up there, and save my soul, but I cannot see it all."

"See what?" said Ebbo. "There may be changes,

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but an old faithful follower of my father's must ever be welcome."

"Not when his wife has taken a new lord," growled the stranger, bitterly, "and he a Wildschloss! Young man, I could have pardoned aught else!"

"I know not who you may be who talk of pardoning my lady-mother," said Ebbo, "but new lord she has neither taken nor will take. She has refused every offer; and, now that Schlangenwald with his last breath confessed that he slew not my father, but sold him to the Turks, I have been only awaiting recovery from my wound to go in search of him."

"Who then is yonder child, who told me she was Wildschloss?"

"That child," said Ebbo, with half a smile and half a blush, "is my wife, the daughter of Wildschloss, who prayed me to marry her thus early, that so my mother might bring her up."

By this time they had reached the castle court, now a well-kept, lordly-looking enclosure, where the pilgrim looked about him as one bewildered. He was so infirm that Ebbo carefully helped him up the stone stairs to the hall, where he saw his mother awaiting him. Leaving him at the entrance, Ebbo crossed the hall to say to her in a low voice, "This pilgrim is one of the old troopers of my grandfather's time. I wonder whether you or Heinz will know him?"

"And thou hast walked up, and wearied thyself!" exclaimed Christina, grieved to see her son's halting step.

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"A rest will soon cure that," said Ebbo, seating himself as he spoke on a settle near the hall fire; but the next moment a shriek from his mother made him start up and spring to her side. She stood with hands clasped, and wondering eyes. The pilgrim—his hat on the ground, his white head and rugged face displayed—was gazing as though devouring her with his eyes, murmuring, "Unchanged! unchanged!"

"What is this!" thundered the young Baron. "What are you saying to the lady?"

"Hush! hush, Ebbo!" exclaimed Christina. "It is thy father! On thy knees! Thy father is come! It is our son, my own lord. Oh, embrace him! Kneel to him, Ebbo!" she wildly cried.

"Hold, mother," said Ebbo, for he felt some doubts, "Is it certain that this is indeed my father?"

"Oh, Ebbo," was the cry of poor Christina, almost beside herself, "how could I not be sure? I know him! I feel it! Oh, my lord, bear with him. He is always so loving! Ebbo, cannot you see it is himself?"

"The young fellow is right," said the stranger, slowly. "I will answer all he may demand."

"Forgive me," said Ebbo, abashed, "forgive me;" and, as his mother broke from him, he fell upon his knee; but he only heard his father's cry, "Ah! Stina, Stina, thou alone art the same," and, looking up, saw her, with her face hidden in the white beard, quivering with a rapture such as he had never seen in her before. It seemed long to him ere she looked up again in her husband's face to

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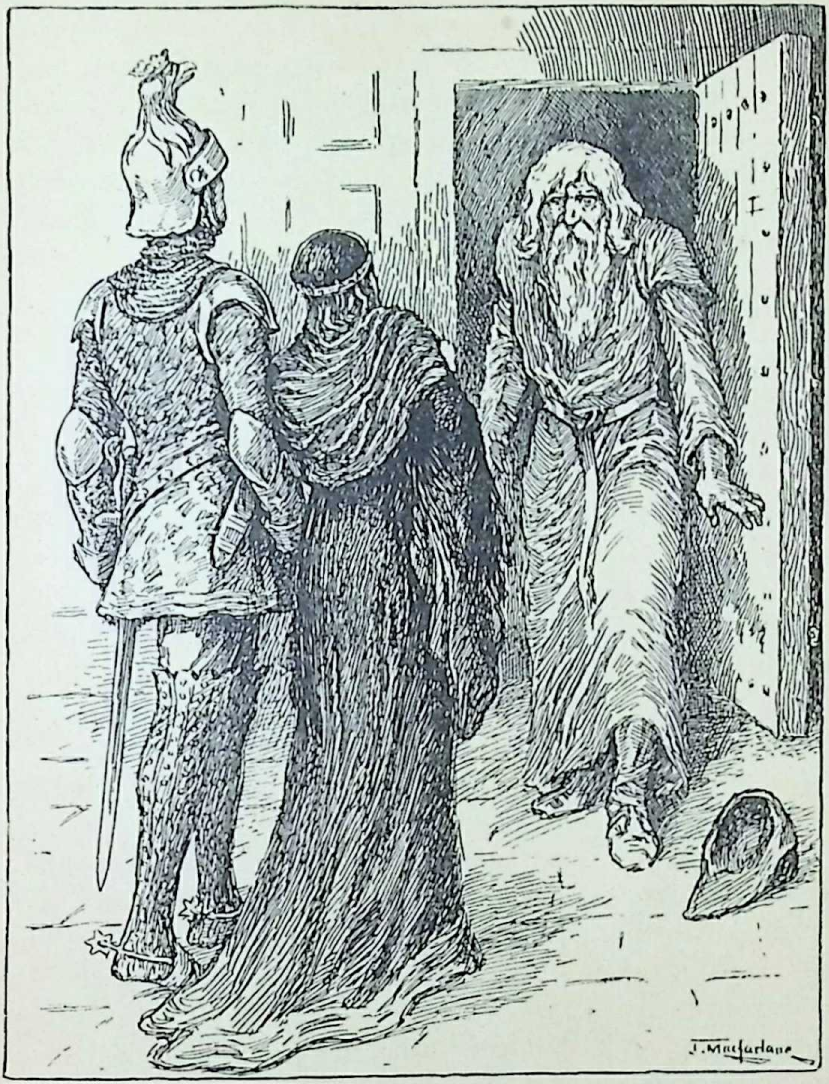

"Hush! hush, Ebbo!" exclaimed Christina. "It is thy father!"

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sob on : " My son ! Oh ! my beautiful twins ! Our son ! Oh, see him, dear lord ! " And the pilgrim turned to hear Ebbo's " Pardon, honoured father, and your blessing."

Almost bashfully the pilgrim laid his hand on the dark head, and murmured something ; then said, " Up, then ! The slayer of Schlangenwald kneeling ! Ah ! Stina, I knew thy little head was wondrous wise, but I little thought thou wouldst breed him up to avenge us on old Wolfgang ! So slender a lad too ! Ha ! Schneiderlein, old rogue, I knew thee. So thou didst get home safe ? "

" Ay, my lord ; though, if I left you alive, never more will I call a man dead," said Heinz.

" Worse luck for me—till now," said Sir Eberhard, whose tones, rather than his looks, carried perfect conviction of his identity. It was the old homely accent, and gruff good-humoured voice, but with something subdued and broken in the tone. He looked much older than his real age ; so worn and lined was his face, his hair and beard white as the mane of his old mare, the proud Adlerstein bearing entirely gone. He stooped even more without his staff than with it ; and, when he yielded himself with a sigh of repose to his wife's tendance, she found that he had not merely the ordinary hurts of travelling, but that there were old festering scars on his ankles. " The gyves," he said, as she looked up at him with startled, pitying eyes. " Little deemed I that they would ever come under thy tender hands."

Ebbo hovered round, supplying all that was needed for his father's comfort ; but his parents were so com-

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pletely absorbed in one another that he was scarcely noticed, and, what perhaps pained him more, there was no word about Friedel. He felt this almost an injustice to the brother who had first thought of seeking the unknown father, and scarcely understood how his parents shrank from any sorrowful thought that might break in on their new-found joy, nor that he himself was a strange new being in his father's eyes, whose tardy, dulled senses as yet seemed unable to feel anything but that here was home, and Christina.

When the chapel bell rang, and the pair rose to offer their thanksgiving, Ebbo dutifully offered his support, but was quite unseen, so fondly was Sir Eberhard leaning on his wife ; and her bright exulting smile gave an absolute pang to the son who had hitherto been all in all to her.

He followed, and, as they passed Friedmund's tomb, he thought his mother pointed to it, but even of this he was uncertain. The pair knelt side by side with hands locked together, while notes of praise rose from all voices ; and meantime Ebbo strove to share the joy, and to lift up a heart that *would* sink in the midst of self-reproach for undutifulness, and would dislike the thought of the rude untaught man coming back to undo all he had achieved, and further absorbing the mother, the mother who was to him all the world.

It was reversing the natural order of things that, after reigning from infancy, he should have to give up at eighteen to one of the last generation ; and some such thought rankled in his mind when the whole household trooped

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joyfully out of the chapel to prepare a banquet for their old new lord, and their young old lord was left alone.

Ebbo threw himself on his knees, and laid his head upon the tomb, murmuring, "Ah, Friedel! Friedel! Would that we had changed places! Thou wouldst brook it better. At least thou didst never know what it is to be lonely."

"Lord Baron!" said a little voice.

His first movement was impatient. Thekla was apt to pursue him wherever he did not want her; but here he had least expected her. But now she was standing near, with a sweet wistfulness in her eyes, such as he had never seen there before.

"What is it, Thekla?" he said. "Art sent to call me?"

"No; only I saw that you stayed here all alone," she said.

"Must I not be alone, child?" he said, bitterly. "Here lies my brother. My mother has her husband again!"

"But you have me!" cried Thekla; and, as he looked up between amusement and melancholy, he met such a loving eager little face, that he could not help holding out his arms, and letting her cling to him. "Indeed," she said, "I'll never be happy again, if you lay down your head there, and say you are alone."

"Never, Thekla! while you are my little wife," said he; and, child as she was, there was strange comfort to his heart in the eyes that held such a look of love and intelligence.

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"What are you going to do?" she said, shuddering a little, as he rose and laid his hand on Friedel's sword.

"To make thee gird on thine own knight's sword," said Ebbo, unbuckling that which he had so long worn. "Friedel," he added, "thou wouldst give me thine. Let me take up thy temper with it, thine open-hearted love and humility."

He guided Thekla's happy little fingers to the fastening of the belt, and then, laying his hand on hers, said gravely, "Thekla, never speak of what I said just now—not even to the mother. Remember, it is thy husband's first secret."

And feeling no longer solitary when his hand was in the clasp of hers, he returned to the hall, where his father was installed in the baronial chair, which had been Ebbo's from babyhood. His mother's exclamation showed that she had missed her son, and she looked fuller than ever of bliss when Ebbo gravely stood before his father, and presented him with the good old sword that he had sent to his unborn son.

"You are like to use it more than I,—nay, you have used it to some purpose," said the elder Baron. "Yet must I keep mine old comrade at least a little while. Wife, son, sword, should make one feel the same man again, but it is all too wonderful!"

All that evening, and long after, his hand from time to time sought the hilt of his sword, as if that touch above all proved to him that he was again a free noble in his own castle.

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His story was a remarkable one. After the fight at the inn he had been flung into a cart among the corpses, but on arriving at Schlangenwald's castle it was found that he was still alive, and he was thrown into a dungeon ; for how long he never knew. By sheer vitality he struggled back to life, and then was sold by his captor as a slave to the Turkish camp. Here he was put to the galleys and kept at the oar for some years, chained to a bench of rowers, between the decks, where in stifling heat and stench the wretched oarsmen were compelled to row the vessel in order to capture Christian ships, urged on by the lash of the slave master, and often dying at the oar from exhaustion and disease. Gian Battista, the Italian merchant whom Ebbo had released, was a fellow-prisoner with him, so that Friedel's guess was correct. There was also a German friar, next to whom Sir Eberhard sat in the galley, and from whom he learned much good that helped to complete the work which Christina's teachings had begun in the wild young Baron's soul.

After some years a bleeding from the lungs, the effects of his old wound, rendered Sir Eberhard useless for the oar, and he was put to labour at the fortifications. Year after year went by in painful toil, until at last he despaired of ever seeing home and Christina again. At length, quite unexpectedly, he was called before a Jewish merchant, questioned as to his name and station, then liberated and shipped off to Genoa, to the care of Gian Battista, who treated him with great honour and informed him that an Austrian noble had ransomed him, and had sent the

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money for his journey home. Gian had sent him on with some Italian merchants, but at Aosta they parted company, and Sir Eberhard was left to the mercy of his guides, who plundered and deserted him, leaving him stranded in a strange land. His only desire was to get back to his own country and learn if his fair young bride still lived, and this he at length accomplished.

Christina and Eberhard listened with breathless interest to the painful story, and Christina wept as she looked at the bowed form once so free, and remembered the unhealed scars. Both Ebbo and Christina guessed that Maximilian was the unknown benefactor who had effected Sir Eberhard's liberation, and the thought made Ebbo more loyal than ever to his hero. Ebbo took care to let his father know that Friedel had lost his life in trying to learn whether he still lived, and that Friedel had intended to seek him among the Turks and ransom him.

The old man appeared bewildered at the idea of these twin sons of his ; his trials had broken him, and now, when his own Christina welcomed him with all the overflow of her loving heart, when his gallant son, in all the bloom of young manhood, received him with dutiful submission ; when the castle, in a state of defence, prosperity, and comfort of which he had never dreamt, was again his own ;—still the old man was bewildered almost to distress. He had, as it were, fallen asleep in one age of the world, and wakened in another, and it seemed as if he could not awaken to reality, for he sat dozing in his chair in the sun the whole of the next day, and scarcely spoke.

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Ebbo tried to refer matters to him, and to explain the past, but he was met sometimes by a shake of the head, sometimes by a nod—not of assent, but of sleep; and his mother advised him not to harass the wearied traveller, but to leave him to himself at least for that day, letting things meantime go on as usual. Ebbo obeyed, but with a load at his heart, as he felt it would be his duty to resign all that he had planned, and partly executed, to this incompetent, ignorant rule.

That very night, tidings rang through the castle that a peasant on the outskirts of the mountain had had his ricks fired and his cattle driven by the robbers, and his young daughters carried off. Old Sir Eberhard hobbled down to the hall in time to see weapons flashing as they were dealt out, to hear a clear decided voice giving orders, to listen to the tramp of horse, and watch more soldiers pass out under the gateway than ever the castle had counted in his father's time. In the morning he found all the womankind of the castle roasting and boiling. And, at noon, little Thekla came rushing down from the watch-tower with news that all were coming home up the Eagle's Steps, and she was sure *her* baron had seen her, and waved to her. Soon after, *her* baron in his glittering steel rode his cream-coloured charger (once Friedel's) into the castle court, followed by his exultant merrymen. They had overtaken the thieves in good time, made them captives, and recovered the spoil unhurt; and Heinz and Koppel made the castle ring with the deed of their young lord, who had forced the huge leader of the band to the earth,

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and kept him down by main strength till they could come to bind him.

"By main strength?" slowly asked Sir Eberhard.

"Ah, Sir," said Heinz, looking from his old master to his young one; "old iron is not a whit stronger than new steel, though the one looks full of might, and you would think the other but a toy."

"And what have you done with the rogues' heads?" asked the old knight. "I looked to see them on your spears. Or have you hung them?"

"Not so, Sir," said Ebbo. "I sent the men off to Stuttgard with an escort. I dislike doing execution ourselves; it makes the men so lawless. Besides, this farmer was a Schlangenwalder."

"And yet he came to you for redress?"

"Yes, for Sir Dankwart is with his regiment, and he and I agreed to look after each other's lands."

Sir Eberhard retired to his chair as if all had gone past his understanding, and thence he looked on while his son and wife hospitably regaled, and then dismissed, their helpers in the rescue.

Later on, Ebbo, with a painful swelling in his heart, approached his father with a request that he would say what was his pleasure with regard to the Emperor, to whom thanks must in the first place be made for his release, and next would arise the whole question of homage and knighthood.

"Look you here, fair son," said Sir Eberhard, rousing himself, "these things are all past me. I'll have none

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of them. You and your Kaiser understand one another, and your homage is paid. Nothing shall be changed for an old fellow that is but come home to die."

"Nay, father, it is right that you should be lord here."

"I never was lord here, and, what is more, I would not, and could not be. Son, I watched you yesterday. You are master as never was my poor father, with all the bawling and blows that used to rule the house. Besides, what should I do with all these mills and bridges of yours, and Councils and Leagues enough to addle a man's brain? No, no; I could once slay a bear, or strike a fair stroke at a Schlangenwalder, but I am good for nothing now but to save my soul. I had thought to do it as a hermit up there; but my little Christina thinks the saints will be just as well pleased if I pray here, with her to help me, and I know that way I shall not make so many mistakes. So, young Sir, if you can give the old man a corner of the hearth while he lives, he will never interfere with you. And, maybe, if the castle were in jeopardy in your absence, with that new-fangled road up to it, he could tell the fellows how to hold it out."

"Sir—dear father," cried the ardent Ebbo, "this is not a fit state of things. I will spare you all trouble and care; only take your own place. Mother, convince him!"

"No, my son," said Sir Eberhard; "your mother sees what is best for me. I only want to be left to her to rest a little while, and repent of my sinful life. As Heinz says, the rusty old iron must lie by while the new steel does the work. It is joy enough for me to see what she has made

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you, and all around. Ah! Stina, my white dove, I knew thine was a wise head; but when I left thee, gentle, frightened, fluttering thing, how little could I have thought that all alone, unaided, thou wouldst have kept that little head above water, and made thy son work out all these changes. I see thou hast made him clerkly, quick-witted, and yet a good knight. Stina, how didst do it?"

"I did it not, dear husband; God did it for me. He gave the boys the loving, true tempers that worked out the rest! He shielded them and me in our days of peril!"

"Yes, father," added Ebbo, "Providence guarded us; but, above all, our chief blessing has been the mother who has made one of us a holy saint, and taught the other to seek after him! Father, I am glad you see how great has been the work of the Dove you brought to the Eagle's Nest."

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